NATION

Nine-year-old found dead at Manipur relief camp

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BUSINESS

Adani Energy clinches ₹2,800cr project in Gujarat

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SPORTS

India's Sankar Subramanian stuns World No. 2 Anders

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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

سالار روزنامہ بنگلور

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Officer who came to the rescue of old parents speaks to Salar News

NAHEED ATAULLA

The Karnataka department of medical education has decided to initiate action against children by cancelling wills or property deeds, who found it convenient to abandon their old parents by admitting them in hospitals.The person behind initiating this action is Mohammad Mohsin, principal secretary in the department of medical education. A forthright and rule book officer of 1996 batch Karnataka cadre, Mohsin had to face the Election Commission's ire , when he was posted as general observer in Sambalpur in Odisha during the 2019 Lok Sabha polls. He got into trouble for ordering the inspection of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's helicopter which led to his suspension. Mohsin in an interview with Naheed Ataulla says he has no regrets for what he did as he was only following the rules.

—Salar News

>>>Interview on Page 5

Tarun Raju denied bail in Ranya gold smuggling case

BENGALURU, 21 MARCH

A special court in Bengaluru rejected the bail plea of Telugu actor Tarun Raju, the second accused in the gold smuggling case linked to Kannada actress Ranya Rao. The case involves allegations of smuggling gold through unauthorised channels. With the court's decision, Raju will remain in custody as further investigations continue. Investigators also pointed out that this was not Raju's first involvement in gold smuggling, alleging that he had played a similar role in at least two previous operations. Rao however, remains in judicial custody.

—Agencies

Farmers seek ₹800cr relief for crop damage

BENGALURU, 21 MARCH

A delegation from the District Farmers' Struggle Committee recently met with Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar in Bengaluru, requesting a relief package of Rs 800 crore for Toor Dal crops severely affected by recent adverse weather conditions. Rainfall during the monsoon caused damage to crops across 19,865 hectares.*—Salar News*

K'taka OKs 4% Muslim quota in public contracts

18 BJP MLAs were suspended for six months for disrupting proceedings

BENGALURU, 21 MARCH

Karnataka Legislative Assembly on Friday passed a Bill to provide 4 per cent reservation for Muslims in public contracts, with strong protests by Opposition BJP.

BJP MLAs climbed on the podium where Speaker U T Khader's chair is placed and threw papers at him.

Later the Assembly passed the Bill to suspend 18 BJP MLAs for six months for disrupting the Assembly's proceedings. Ruckus erupted in the Assembly as BJP MLAs entered the Well of the House and also tore and threw papers at the Speaker UT Khader's chair.

The 'Karnataka Transparency in Public Procurements (Amendment) Bill, 2025' was piloted by Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister H K Patil.

Marshalls carry BJP MLA SR Vishwanath from Assembly Session after chaos during the session at Vidhana Soudha in Bengaluru on Friday; CM Siddaramaiah addresses Assembly Session ***PHOTOS: MOHAMMED ASAD/ SALAR***

The Cabinet on last Friday had approved an amendment to the Karnataka Transparency in Public Procurements Act, reserving for Muslims 4 per cent of contracts in (civil) works valued up to Rs 2 crore, and goods/ services procurement contracts up to Rs 1 crore. This was announced by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah in his 2025-26 Budget. At present, Karnataka has reservation in civil works contracts for SC/ STs (24 per cent) and OBC contractors belonging to Category-1 (4 per cent) and Category-2A (15 per cent). BJP termed government's move an "unconstitutional misadventure", and had said it will oppose it at all levels, including challenging it in court, until it is rolled back.

As per the Bill, it aims to overcome the unemployment problem in the backward classes and to encourage their participation in construction works, not exceeding 4 per cent for the people belonging to the category 2B of backward classes (Muslims), out of the total number of government construction works upto Rs 2 crore.

Meanwhile, Union Minister Shobha Karandlaje urged Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot to withhold consent to the Bill. In a letter she termed the Bill "unconstitutional, discriminatory, and against the ethos of the Indian Constitution. *—PTI*

CM, MINISTERS TO NOW GET HIGHER SALARIES

The Karnataka Legislative Assembly on Friday passed bills approving a salary hike for the Chief Minister, Ministers, and all legislators, which will cost the exchequer Rs 62 crore annually. The Karnataka Ministers Salaries and Allowance (Amendment) Bill and the Karnataka Legislature Salaries, Pensions and Allowances (Amendment) Bill, 2025 were passed amid chaos, without any discussion, as the opposition BJP protested against the 4 per cent reservation for Muslims in public contracts and demanded a judicial probe into an alleged "honey-trap" attempt involving a minister. As per the Ministers Salaries and Allowance (Amendment) Bill, the Chief Minister's monthly salary will increase from Rs 75,000 to Rs 1.5 lakh, while ministers' salaries will rise from Rs 60,000 to Rs 1.25 lakh.

Palace Grounds Bill passed, TDR to royal family blocked

BENGALURU, 21 MARCH

The Karnataka Assembly and Council on Friday passed the Bengaluru Palace (Utilisation and Regulation of Land) (Amendment) Bill, which seeks to assert the State government's control over the expansive Palace Grounds, spanning 472 acres and 16 guntas here.

On 24 January, the State cabinet decided to reject the issuance of Transferable Development Rights (TDR) to the Mysuru royal family for acquiring nearly 16 acres of land within the Palace Grounds. Subsequently, the government issued an ordinance on 29 January to formalise the decision. According to the government, granting TDR for the Palace Grounds would not align with the State's interests. It said that part of the land which was acquired under the Bangalore Palace (Acquisition and Transfer) Act, 1996, was sought to be utilised for an infrastructure project to the extent of 15 acres 17.5 gunta, out of which only 1217.41 square meters has been utilised. It also said that no TDR under section 14B of the Karnataka Town and Country Planning Act will apply to the land 'vested with the Government' pursuant to the Bangalore Palace (Acquisition and Transfer) Act, 1996. *—PTI*

Curious case of Delhi HC judge's 'cash'

NEW DELHI, 21 MARCH

Large sums of cash were allegedly found in Delhi High Court Judge Justice Yashwant Varma's residence by fire authorities, during a fire incident, sparking a major controversy. The official amount of money was not disclosed at the time.

The Supreme Court collegium were then said to have initiated the process to transfer Justice Varma to the Allahabad High Court.

Justice Yashwant Varma
PHOTO: PTI

The five-member collegium headed by Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna held an urgent meeting following the reported incident and decided to initiate the process of shifting Justice Varma out of the Delhi High Court.

The Allahabad High Court Bar Association on the other hand, opposed the transfer saying it was not a "trash bin". The statement added, "The decision of the collegium raises a serious question as to whether the Allahabad high Court is a trash bin?"

The collegium also commenced an initial inquiry into the mater. The initial inquiry, which is not an in-house inquiry as envisaged in Supreme Court judgements, would entail seeking of a primary report on the incident from the Chief Justice of the Delhi High Court

However, as the controversy heated up, eliciting reactions from political parties and senior lawmakers, the Supreme Court issued a statement, saying that Justice Varma's transfer was independent from the enquiry and claimed that there was misinformation being spread around the matter.

"There is misinformation and rumours being spread with regard to the incident at the residence of Justice Yashwant Varma," the apex court said in a statement.

Similarly, Delhi Fire Services Chief Atul Garg said that no cash was recovered from Justive Varma's residence. "Soon after dousing the flames, we informed police about the fire incident. Thereafter, a team of fire department personnel left the spot. Our fire fighters did not find any cash during their fire fighting operation," the DFS chief said.

Despite the clarifications, Justice Varma did not hold his court session on Friday, his court master said. *—PTI*

CAUVERY AARTI

People perform pooja and aarti during the Cauvery Aarti at Sankey Lake in Bengaluru to mark World Water Day on Friday. The event aims to honour the Cauvery River, the City's primary water source, and set a Guinness World Record for most pledges received for a water conservation campaign
PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD *>>>More on Page 2*

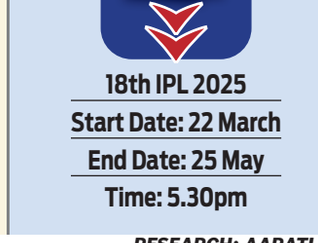
Remarks on colleague's hair not harassment: HC

MUMBAI, 21 MARCH

The Bombay High Court has ruled that commenting on and singing a song about a colleague's hair does not constitute sexual harassment in the workplace. In a judgment delivered on 18 March, Justice Sandeep Marne granted relief to Vinod Kachave, a senior executive at HDFC Bank in Pune, who was previously demoted following an internal complaint.

Kachave had appealed a July 2024 ruling from the industrial court that upheld findings from the bank's Internal Complaints Committee, which found him guilty of misconduct under the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 (POSH Act).

- HC found that the industrial court's conclusions were "clearly perverse" and stressed that no concrete evidence existed to support claims of sexual harassment



The woman's complaint described Kachave as having commented on her hair, including a song referencing it. The High Court found that the industrial court's conclusions were "clearly perverse" and stressed that no concrete evidence existed to support claims of sexual harassment.

Kachave's lawyer, Sana Raees Khan, argued that the comments did not fall within the scope of the POSH Act, emphasising that the sexual harassment complaint arose only after the complainant had submitted her resignation. The court noted that the her prior messages expressing gratitude to Kachave raised serious doubts about whether she was truly offended by his remarks. *—PTI*

GAME ON!

Epic clashes to smashes: IPL begins today

BIGGEST SIGNINGS

- **SHREYAS IYER:** ₹26.75 crore (Punjab Kings)

MOST EXPENSIVE FOREIGN PLAYER:

- **JOS BUTTLER** (₹ 15.75 crore, Gujarat Titans)
- Base price: ₹20 lakh

RISHABH PANT Most expensive player: ₹ 27 crore (Lucknow Super Giants)

KEY TALKING POINTS

- **RCB'S TITLE DROUGHT** Will they finally win after 17 seasons?
- **MS DHONI'S FUTURE** Will this be his last IPL season?
- **GILL-BUTTLER PARTNERSHIP** Gujarat's key players aiming for a strong season. Buttler's arrival in Gujarat through a high-profile transfer this year strengthens their batting depth.

JASPRIT BUMRAH'S FITNESS Mumbai Indians' star pacer expected to return mid-season.

MAJOR ABSENCES & COMEBACKS

- **HARDIK PANDYA (MI)** Suspended for first match on 23 March due to slow over-rate penalty from last season.
- **JASPRIT BUMRAH (MI)** Likely to miss the start due to a back injury.

VIRAT KOHLI'S Milestone Watch: Needs just 256 runs to become the first player to reach 7,500 IPL runs.

RULE CHANGES & FORMAT UPDATES

- BCCI has lifted the ban on using saliva to shine the cricket ball.
- Impact player rule continues: Teams can substitute one player mid-game.
- Strategic timeouts extended by 30 seconds for additional tactical discussions.
- Duckworth-Lewis-Stern (DLS) System Adjustment: To improve its accuracy by refining calculations based on modern scoring trends.

PRIZE MONEY Winner: ₹20 crore
Runners-up: ₹12.5 crore

18th IPL 2025
Start Date: 22 March
End Date: 25 May
Time: 5.30pm

OPENING CEREMONY
Bollywood stars Disha Patani & singer Shreya Ghoshal to perform.

OPENING MATCH

Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) vs. **Royal Challengers** Bengaluru (RCB) at Eden Gardens

RESEARCH: AARATI KRISHNA, DESIGN: G VISHWANATHA

PHOTO: SALAR

Salesman held for duping ₹96L in welding rod scam

BENGALURU, 21 MARCH

A salesman has been arrested by Halasuru Gate police for allegedly defrauding his employer by unlawfully selling welding rods valued at Rs 96 lakh and siphoning off the proceeds into his personal account. Authorities have so far recovered Rs 11.24 lakh in cash from the accused. According to police reports, the accused was employed by a private hardware firm on SP Road in the city. He purportedly sold welding rods to various shops in Bengaluru, Mandya, and Channapatna, failing to deposit the earnings into the company's account. Instead, he kept the money through cash dealings and bank transfers. The fraud was uncovered when the company's management detected financial discrepancies. *—Salar News*

Namma Metro to open early for Bidadi Marathon

BENGALURU, 21 MARCH

The Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Limited (BMRCL) has announced that metro services will commence earlier on Sunday to aid commuters attending the Bidadi Marathon. On the day of the event, metro trains will begin operations at 5am instead of the usual 7am from all four terminal stations. Additionally, to further accommodate those heading to the marathon, services from Nadaprabhu Kempegowda Station, Majestic, towards Challaghatta will kick off at 4am. This initiative aims to ensure smooth transportation for the expected large turnout of participants. BMRCL has urged commuters to plan their journeys accordingly. *—Salar News*

Aurad (B) MLA slams poor town hygiene

BENGALURU, 21 MARCH

Former Minister and MLA of Aurad (B), Prabhu B Chavan, conducted a thorough inspection of sanitation and infrastructure in all 20 wards of Aurad (B) on Friday. His tour revealed concerning unhygienic conditions, particularly in Ward 6, where blocked drains prompted him to reprimand municipal officers. Chavan emphasised the urgent need for improved sanitation, insisting that each ward should have two dedicated sanitation workers and proper garbage collection vehicles. He addressed residents' complaints about delays in releasing housing funds, directly contacting officials to resolve the matter within five days. During his visit, he acknowledged the severe water shortages in various wards and initiated an Rs 84 crore project to secure water supply from the Karanja Reservoir, aiming to eliminate future shortages. *—Salar News*

BMTC introduces special bus services for IPL

BENGALURU, 21 MARCH

In a bid to ensure seamless transportation for fans attending IPL matches at M Chinnaswamy Stadium, the Bengaluru Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTC) has announced the launch of special bus services on match days. In a notification released on Friday, BMTC detailed that it will operate buses from the stadium to numerous key locations throughout the city on 2 April, 10 April, 18 April, 24 April, 3 May, 13 May, and 17 May. Routes will serve areas including Kadugodi Bus Station (via HAL Road), Sarjapur, Electronic City (via Hosur Road), Bannerghatta National Park, Janapriya Township (via Magadi Road), RK Hegde Nagar-Yelahanka (via Nagavara and Tannery Road), Hosakote, and Banashankari. *—Salar News*

Oppn seeks judicial probe into 'honey trap' scandal

CM assured a high-level investigation into allegations

BENGALURU, 21 MARCH

In a dramatic session of the Karnataka Assembly on Friday, Opposition parties, including the BJP and JD(S), demanded a judicial investigation led by a sitting High Court judge into allegations of a "honey trap" involving Cooperation Minister KN Rajanna and other politicians. The uproar came after Rajanna claimed that he was targeted in an attempt to blackmail him, asserting that at least 48 politicians from various parties had suffered similar schemes.

BJP and JD(S) members stormed into the well of the House, protesting with CDs in hand and shouting slogans, even as Chief Minister Siddaramaiah assured them of a high-level probe.

Siddaramaiah asserted that there would be a thorough investigation, promising that no one would be shielded, regardless of their political rank. However, the opposition pressed for clarity on the nature of the inquiry, suggesting that the involvement of a High Court judge or even the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) was warranted due to the gravity of the allegations. "This is not just one party's issue; it represents a conspiracy against all legislators," said BJP MLA R Ashoka, who reiterated the call for a judicial inquiry.

Opposition members protest against the State government with CDs during the Assembly Session at Vidhana Soudha in Bengaluru on Friday **PHOTO: SALAR**

In response to the chaos, State BJP President BY Vijayendra emphasised that the government should take the matter seriously and insisted on an independent investigation, mentioning that initially, the Home Minister had expressed intent to probe the matter but later claimed he had not received a formal complaint. This discrepancy raised suspicions of a cover-up within the Congress-led government.

Moreover, another BJP MLA, Basanagouda Patil, formally requested that the Home Minister refer the case to the CBI for an impartial examination. Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar criticized the BJP, calling it a cultureless party that supports the "Bombay Boys" and highlighting an incident where a party member allegedly assaulted a woman in the Vidhana Soudha.

He said, "BJP are goondas, and it is a matter of shame. In my 36 years in the Legislative Assembly, I have never witnessed such behavior". *—PTI*

Cops warn against forcing shutdown during B'luru bandh

BENGALURU, 21 MARCH

Following a call for a bandh by pro-Kannada organisations in protest against the Maharashtra Ekikaran Samiti (MES), Bengaluru City Police Commissioner B Dayananda has issued a firm warning against any attempts to enforce the shutdown through force.

Addressing reporters, Dayananda affirmed that, although certain Kannada groups have announced the bandh, law enforcement is fully prepared to maintain order and ensure public safety.

"Strict action will be taken against anyone found forcing businesses to close, obstructing people from working, or engaging in any disruptive activities," he stated. Police personnel have been deployed throughout the city, with officers instructed to ensure a peaceful protest.

He further stressed that hotels and shops cannot be compelled to shut and indicated that the leaders of the organisations behind the bandh have been made aware of the court's directives. They have been strictly advised not to inconvenience the public or cause disturbances.

B Dayananda **PHOTO: PTI**

Cops have guaranteed adequate security measures for the day of protest, cautioning that any breach of law and order will be dealt with decisively.

Meanwhile, Hotel Owners Association of Mysuru District has announced that it will not support the bandh Citing the recent assault on a KSRTC bus conductor in Belagavi, the Association noted that the government has already taken decisive action regarding the incident. *—Salar News*

City hotel worker caught with 'explosive' material

BENGALURU, 21 MARCH

A suspicious substance resembling an explosive was discovered in accommodation for hotel workers in Bellahalli, prompting a police investigation. The Sampigehalli police recovered a box containing the object, which has been sent for forensic analysis.

The substance was found inside a polythene bag belonging to Abdul Rehman, a 23-year-old local resident.

Rehman had approached the Sri Devi Vaibhav Hotel on Wednesday in search of a helper position. Although he was provided with lodging alongside other workers, he had not yet submitted his identification and address proof as requested by the hotel management. On Thursday, his roommates inspected Rehman's belongings and were alarmed to discover the substance within a box in his polythene bag. The hotel management promptly informed the police, who swiftly arrived and took Rehman into custody. Rehman claimed he had discovered the box while scavenging for scrap in an isolated area of Bellahalli. However, the police have initiated legal action under the Explosive Substances Act and are conducting an extensive investigation. Joint Commissioner of Police, East Division, Ramesh Banoth, told **Salar News** that initial assessments by the bomb squad suggested the object might be a type of firecracker, but further testing is necessary. The recovered material has been sent to the Forensic Science Laboratory for detailed analysis, and probe remains ongoing. *—Salar News*

SSLC EXAMINATIONS

Students during SSLC board examination Malleshwaram Centre in Bengaluru on Friday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

100% penalty on tax defaulters only after 2 years: BBMP

BENGALURU, 21 MARCH

The Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) has clarified that a 100 per cent penalty on property tax defaulters is imposed only after a two-year period of non-payment, countering reports that suggested immediate penalties.

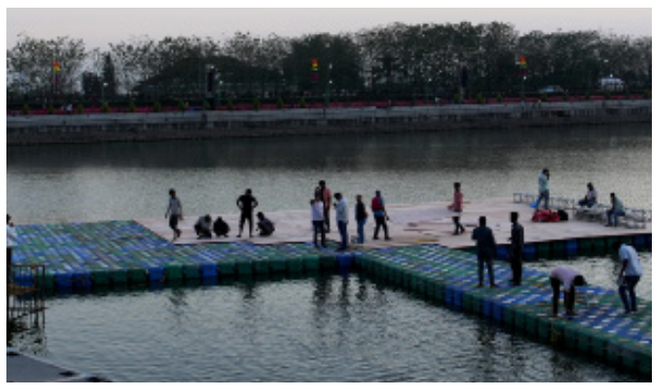
The civic authority explained that property owners are given ample opportunity to settle their dues before penalties apply. Over the course of two years, multiple notices, SMS reminders, and advertisements are dispatched to. For example, if the property tax for 2024-25 remains unpaid, a simple interest of 15 per cent is levied during 2025-26, while the 100 per cent penalty will apply only if the tax remains unsettled by April 2026. *—Salar News*

Govt forms team to curb Cauvery encroachment, pollution

KODAGU, 21 MARCH

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar announced the formation of a dedicated team to combat encroachment along the flow of the Cauvery River and to curb pollution affecting its waters. Speaking to reporters in Bhagamandala, he stated, "We are forming a team to stop encroachment and pollution of the Cauvery. We will do whatever it takes to protect our land, water, history, and traditions."

To mark World Water Day on 22 March, the Karnataka government will launch a week-long campaign focusing on water conservation. Shivakumar will also lead a "Cauvery Aarti," aimed at raising awareness regarding the importance of water. He expressed gratitude and offered prayers to Goddess Cauvery for good rainfall and a bountiful harvest this year.



To mark World Water Day on 22 March, government will launch a week-long campaign focusing on water conservation **PHOTO: PTI**

Emphasising local involvement, he confirmed that officials have been instructed to ensure participation from artists in Kodagu for the Cauvery Aarti. "We have already earmarked funds for the Cauvery Aarti. The frequency of the event will be decided in the coming days," he noted.

The water conservation initiative will include an oath against water misuse, which can be taken both during the Aarti at Sankey Tank and online. *—PTI*

City nurse found dead in suspicious circumstances

BENGALURU, 21 MARCH

A 35-year-old staff nurse from a private hospital was found dead under suspicious circumstances at her residence in Suddagunte Palya on Thursday evening, raising concerns of foul play.

The woman, identified as Shilpa, was discovered lifeless, and authorities are currently investigating whether her death could be classified as suicide or homicide.

Shilpa's husband and in-laws assert that she took her own life, but police officials remain sceptical. The body has been sent for a postmortem examination, with investigators indicating that the findings will clarify the cause of death.

"The circumstances are unclear, and we're treating this as a suspicious death until the autopsy results are in," a police spokesperson told **Salar News**. *—Salar News*

Mysuru parents sell baby girl for ₹14,000, rescued

MYSURU, 21 MARCH

A two-year-old girl, allegedly sold by her biological parents for Rs 14,000, was rescued on Thursday by a team of officials from the Department of Women and Child Welfare, the police, and the District Child Protection Committee.

The child's parents, Sowmya and Anilkumar from Neelakantanagar in Nanjangud town, had reportedly sold her to a childless couple from a village in Chamarajanagar district.

The incident came to light on 13 March when an Anganwadi worker from Neelakantanagar learned about the sale from the child's grandmother, Nagamma. The worker informed the Nanjangud Child Development Programme Officer (CDPO), who then alerted the District Child Protection Committee.

On 20 March, with the assistance of the Nanjangud police, officials rescued the girl from Chamarajanagar. She was handed over to the District Child Welfare Committee for care and rehabilitation.

A case has been registered against the child's parents, Sowmya and Anilkumar, as well as a broker named Lakshamma. Authorities also rescued the couple's two other daughters, and all three children have been placed at Chayadevi Adoption Centre in Mysuru. *—Salar News*

Laws apply to all, BJP on X's court move

NEW DELHI, 21 MARCH

Following Elon Musk's platform X (formerly Twitter) filing a case in the Karnataka High Court, Bharatiya Janata Party leader Rajeev Chandrasekhar stated that the company is entitled to seek legal redress, but emphasised that the "law applies equally" to all. He reiterated Prime Minister Narendra Modi's stance that digital platforms must ensure they are "trustworthy." He said, "India is a country where the law applies to everybody. 'X' is within its right to go to court to challenge what it believes is unlawful. In January 2024, I remarked that any platform introduced to Indian consumers must clearly state if it is experimental. If it is, this must be disclosed to users to avoid deploying erroneous AI." On 20 March, X approached the Karnataka High Court to contest the Indian government's invocation of Section 79 (3)(b) of the Information Technology Act, claiming misuse of this provision in enforcing content blocking orders via the Sahyog government portal.

Meanwhile, sources from the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology said no formal notice had been issued to either X or its intelligence division Grok regarding allegations that a chatbot was using Hindi slang. *—ANI*

Rajeev Chandrasekhar **PHOTO: ANI**

AMID LANGUAGE DEBATE

RSS advocates for mother tongue education

BENGALURU, 21 MARCH

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) has reaffirmed its commitment to using mother tongues for education and daily communication, amidst ongoing discussions regarding the Hindi language and the three-language formula under the National Education Policy. CR Mukunda, the joint general secretary of RSS, stated that the current debates surrounding delimitation are "politically motivated".

During a press conference at the start of the RSS's three-day Akhil Bharatiya Pratinidhi Sabha (ABPS) meeting, Mukunda expressed concern over forces that threaten national unity, implicitly referencing the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) Party's opposition to the proposed language policy. He remarked that the meeting would address various contemporary issues, including the socio-political turmoil in Manipur and the perceived 'North-South divide' in India.

RSS Chief Mohan Bhagwat with RSS General Secretary Dattatreya Hosabale during a meeting in Bengaluru, on Friday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

Mukunda clarified that the RSS would not be passing any resolutions regarding the three-language policy, but reiterated the organisation's preference for mother tongue usage in education and everyday life. He acknowledged the ongoing strife in Manipur, which has persisted for 20 months, but expressed hope that recent government decisions provide a path forward for the region. Efforts to unite the warring tribal communities of Meitis and Kukis are underway, with Mukunda emphasising the importance of political solutions alongside community efforts to foster harmony.

In response to concerns over the National Register of Citizens, Mukunda stated the RSS supports a clear identification for residents of India but refrained from making specific resolutions on the matter. *—PTI*

Assam govt amends Cattle Preservation Act

GUWAHATI, 21 MARCH

The Assam government on Friday introduced a Bill to amend the 'Assam Cattle Preservation Act 2021' to allow individuals to transport cattle for bona fide agricultural, animal husbandry or trade purposes. The 'statement of objects and reasons' of the Bill said the proposed amendment would permit any person, along with agencies or farms registered under the Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Department of Assam, to transport cattle for legitimate agricultural or animal husbandry purposes or trade. This change aligns the Act with a ruling by the Gauhati High Court on 3 December, 2024, which allowed the petitioner to seek permission for transporting cattle for these purposes. The original Act was passed by the Assembly in August 2021, which regulates slaughter, consumption and transportation of cattle in the state. *—PTI*

ED makes fresh arrest from TN in PFI-SDPI case

NEW DELHI, 12 MARCH

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has arrested a man from Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu following a fresh round of searches in a money laundering case against the Social Democratic Party of India (SDPI), the political front of the banned Popular Front of India, official sources said Friday. Wahidur Rahman Jainullabudeen was taken into custody under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) from Mettupalayam in Coimbatore district on Thursday, sources said. Fresh raids were launched by the agency on Thursday in Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan, West Bengal and Kerala. The federal probe agency carried out the first round of searches in the case on 6 March after it arrested MK Faizy, the national President of SDPI, from Delhi airport on 3 March. *—PTI*

Employ only Hindus in Tirumala Temple: Naidu

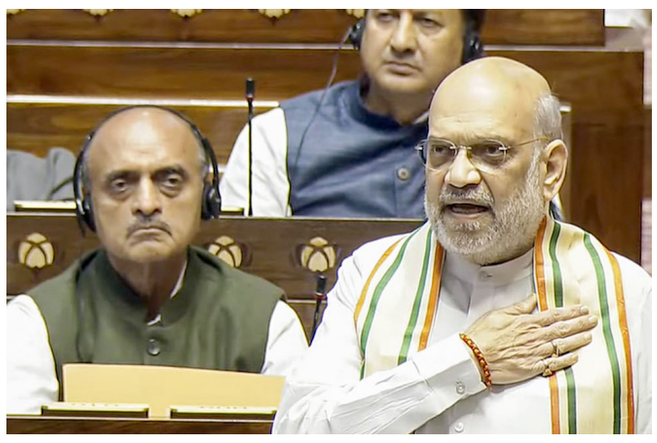
TIRUMALA, 21 MARCH

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu said on Friday that only Hindus should be employed at the Tirumala Temple, and if individuals from other communities are currently working there then they will be relocated to other places without hurting their sentiments. He also announced plans to build Venkateswara Swamy temples in all state capitals across India. He emphasized that a sacred thread has been worn to protect Lord Venkateswara's assets worldwide. The government has now decided to cancel the approval for the hotel, which was planned on 35.32 acres of land. While the hotel management had proposed serving only vegetarian food, the government has made it clear that no private individuals will be granted permission in this area. *—PTI*

Shah says those debating on language hiding corruption

Stalin sends video message on the eve of JAC meet

NEW DELHI/CHENNAI 21 MARCH



Union Home Minister Amit Shah speaks in the Rajya Sabha during the Budget session of Parliament, in New Delhi on Friday ***PHOTO: PTI***

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday attacked opposition parties in the Rajya Sabha for raking up the language row, saying they were doing so to gain political mileage and hide their corruption.

"Those who take shelter behind the language issue to hide their corruption," Shah said. "Some parties are raking up the language issue for their own politics."

"There have been enough divisions in the nation in the name of language, and it should not happen anymore," he said, amid the escalating row over the three-language formula implementation outlined in the National Education Policy.

"I want to tell the Tamil Nadu government; you do not have the courage to provide medical and engineering education in Tamil because your economic interests will be affected," he alleged.

Without naming any party or individual, Shah said, "Those who are spreading poison in the name of language prefer a foreign language and not an Indian language. Tamil youths can work in Gujarat, Kashmir, Delhi... You have been elected to Parliament, what kind of a system do you want?"

Meanwhile, in a video message on the eve of the first meeting of the Joint Action Committee, Stalin Tamil Nadu Chief Minister and DMK President MK Stalin highlighted the importance of fighting against delimitation.

By 2026, delimitation will happen. And if delimitation exercise is carried out based on population, our representation in Parliament will be severely affected. This is not just about the number of MPs. This is about our state's rights," he said. "Our voices in Parliament will be silenced. Our rights will be compromised," he added. "This is nothing short of a deliberate attempt to undermine certain states. This meeting will chart the course forward. Based on the meeting's outcome, we will take the next steps. Our rightful demand will prevail. Our initiative will protect India." *—PTI*

> **If someone (Rahul Gandhi) is sitting with kaala chashma (black glasses) on, how is it possible to show them development? One leader went on a footmarch, went to Kashmir, played Holi with snow with his karyakartas and then claimed he saw terrorists from afar If someone has terrorist in their mind, he will appear in your dreams as well as in Kashmir**
>
> -Amit Shah, Union Home Minister

FARMERS PROTEST

SKM, BKU say 'no thank you' to talks

NEW DELHI, 21 MARCH

Amid the crackdown on the protesting farmers by the Punjab Police, the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) and Bharti Kisan Union (Ugrahan) on Friday declined to participate in the meeting called by the Punjab government on Friday.

Slamming the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government for police action against farmers, the farmer bodies sought the creation of a conducive environment for talks while demanding the release of the detained protesters.

The SKM also announced to postpone its proposed march to the Punjab Assembly on 26 March.

The Punjab government had invited the SKM and BKU (Ugrahan) for a meeting with state Agriculture Minister Gurmeet Singh Khuddian on Friday.

The invitation came ahead of the SKM's call for a march to the Punjab Vidhan Sabha on 26 March.

The BKU (Ugrahan) said while it favours dialogues to resolve any issue, "the question arises whether having the meeting under these circumstances (detention of farmers) is right".

"What is the guarantee that those invited for the talks will not be arrested later," BKU (Ugrahan) president Joginder Singh Ugrahan asked.

Meanwhile, traffic resumed at the Khanauri farmers protest site on Friday, more than a year after the Punjab-Haryana border point was closed due to the agitation.

Earlier on Thursday, traffic resumed through another protest epicentre -- the Shambhu border point (Shambhu-Ambala Highway) -- a day after Punjab Police detained protesting farmers and demolished their temporary structures at the site. Haryana police had removed roadblocks on their side of the road both at Shambhu and Khanauri. Police had fortified the border points with iron nails and barbed wire to prevent farmers from Punjab to go towards the Delhi. *—PTI*

US SC to hear Rana's extradition stay plea

NEW DELHI, 21 MARCH

Tahawwur Rana ***PHOTO: PTI***

The US Supreme Court is set to hear next month a renewed application from Tahawwur Rana, an accused in the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks, seeking to block his extradition to India. Rana, 64, is incarcerated at Metropolitan Detention Center in Los Angeles and filed an "Emergency Application for Stay Pending Litigation" on 27 February, 2025, which was originally addressed to Justice Elena Kagan, who denied it earlier this month. Rana's renewed request has now been directed to Chief Justice John Roberts.

Linking him to David Coleman Headley, one of the principal conspirators behind the 26/11 attacks, Rana argues that his extradition violates US law and the United Nations Convention Against Torture, citing a risk of torture due to his background as a Muslim of Pakistani origin and his health conditions, which include multiple chronic diagnoses.

His legal team contends that extraditing him would amount to a "de facto" death sentence, given his acute medical issues. As the case develops, Rana's attorneys are pressing for a thorough review of his claims before any decision on extradition is made. The Supreme Court will deliberate on his application during a conference scheduled for 4 April. *—PTI*

AAP rejigs top leadership after Delhi loss

NEW DELHI, 21 MARCH

Saurabh Bharadwaj ***PHOTO: PTI***

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has undergone a significant organisational reshuffle, appointing former minister Saurabh Bharadwaj as president of its Delhi unit and senior leader Manish Sisodia as in-charge for Punjab, following their recent Assembly election defeat in Delhi. Bharadwaj succeeds Gopal Rai, while Sisodia assumes responsibility for Punjab, the only state where AAP currently holds power.

The changes were decided during a meeting of the party's Political Affairs Committee (PAC) at the residence of party leader Arvind Kejriwal. Kejriwal congratulated the newly appointed leaders on social media.

Gopal Rai will oversee AAP's operations in Gujarat as the party aims to expand its presence there. Meanwhile, Sandeep Pathak, a Rajya Sabha MP, will head the AAP's Chhattisgarh unit, and Pankaj Gupta will lead the Goa chapter. Punjab, Gujarat, and Goa are all set to hold Assembly elections in the coming two years.

Bharadwaj highlighted that despite the electoral setback, nearly 43.5 per cent of votes were cast for AAP, underscoring the need to unify support in the capital. Sisodia expressed his gratitude for his new role, emphasising collaboration with party leaders to meet the expectations of the people in Punjab and accelerate progress. *—PTI*

These are good officers: AAP on engg's suspension

NEW DELHI, 21 MARCH

A Delhi Assembly Leader of Opposition Atishi on Friday targeted Delhi Minister Parvesh Verma for making wrong statements about the officers of government.

At a press conference, she said these are the same officers who have worked in Delhi even in adverse circumstances in the last 10 years. "These are the officers who have provided good infrastructure to the government hospitals in Delhi...." This comes after Verma ordered the suspension of the Public Works Department (PWD) executive engineer while inspecting drainages in the national capital. "The cleaning of drains is the responsibility of the PWD department, which is not happening. This is why I have ordered that the XEN here be suspended. All officers have been told that if they do not work properly, action will be taken. We can't leave Delhi, our capital, like this," Verma told reporters.

The minister said that the entire system of Delhi had "broken down" in the last 10 years while adding that strict instructions have been issued to government officials that negligence would not be tolerated. *—ANI*

GONGS AND FLUTES IN ASSEMBLY

Odisha Assembly saw an unusual scene on Friday as Congress MLAs wearing black outfits played flutes and gongs. They were protesting against "rising crimes against women in the state" under the BJP government ***PHOTO: ANI***

India voices concerns to US on deportee treatment

NEW DELHI, 21 MARCH

India has officially expressed its concerns to US authorities regarding the treatment of deportees on recent repatriation flights, particularly relating to the use of shackles, especially on women. Minister of State for External Affairs, Kirti Vardhan Singh, conveyed this in a written response to the Lok Sabha on Friday.

Singh noted that the US State Department assured the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) that detainees on the three deportation flights (5, 15, and 16 February) were not instructed to remove any religious head coverings and did not request religious accommodations, aside from vegetarian meals.

The MEA acknowledged the need for sensitivity towards the religious and dietary preferences of deportees and confirmed that concerns had been raised about the shackling of individuals during repatriation. The first batch of 104 illegal Indian immigrants was deported on 5 February by a US Air Force C-17 Globemaster. Singh affirmed that the MEA remains engaged with US officials to ensure humane treatment of deportees.

He emphasised that the Standard Operating Procedure for deportations, effective since 2012, allows the use of restraints for safety reasons, although women and minors are generally exempt. The Indian Government confirmed that no women or children were shackled on the flights that landed on 15 and 16 February. *—PTI*

9 CPI(M) workers convicted in BJP activist's murder

KANNUR, 21 MARCH

A Kerala court on Friday found nine members of the CPI(M) guilty in the nearly two-decade-old murder case of Elambilayi Suraj, a BJP worker. The sentencing for the convicted will be announced on Monday. Among those found guilty is TK Rajeesh, who is serving a prison sentence related to the 2012 murder of TP Chandrasekharan.

The prosecution argued that Suraj was killed as a result of political rivalry after he left the CPI(M) to join BJP. Rajeesh and another accused, PM Manoraj, were implicated following Suraj's statements to police. The murder occurred on 7 August 2005, when a group arrived in an auto and attacked Suraj near a telephone exchange. *—PTI*

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

Former Odisha MLA Devendra Sharma dies at 66

BHUBANESWAR, 21 MARCH

Senior Congress leader and former Odisha MLA Devendra Sharma died at a private hospital here on Friday evening, family sources said. Sharma, 66, was suffering from cancer and was undergoing treatment for the last several days, they said. Sharma was elected to the Odisha Assembly from Aul segment in Kendrapara district in 2014 but was defeated in 2019. He had also served as the president of Kendrapara district Congress committee. Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi, state Congress president Bhakta Charan Das and many other political leaders expressed grief over Sharma's demise. *—PTI*

'APOLOGISE FOR MISBEHAVIOUR'

Nitish insulted nat'l anthem: Oppn

PATNA, 21 MARCH

Recently at an event, Bihar CM Nitish Kumar abruptly got off the stage and began talking with the others during the national anthem ***PHOTO: ANI***

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Friday came under heavy opposition fire, in both Houses of state legislature, for allegedly disrespecting the national anthem at a public function.

When the announcement for the national anthem was made after inauguration of the Sepak Takraw World Cup 2025 here on Thursday, Kumar had abruptly got off the stage and began exchanging pleasantries with the participants. Later, when the national anthem was played, he stood smiling and waving at bystanders.

Opposition party members reached the legislature carrying the tricolour, posters and banners printed with slogans denouncing the CM's behaviour and raised slogans that read "no insult to the national anthem shall be tolerated in India".

Inside the assembly Tejashwi Yadav, the leader of the opposition, demanded that an adjournment motion moved by his party be taken up for discussion immediately.

Yadav told reporters outside the assembly: " If the chief minister does not apologise, it would set a wrong precedent. Also, it is becoming evident day by day that he is not mentally sound". RJD MLC Sunil Kumar Singh, who was expelled last year for "misbehaving" with the chief minister, only to be reinstated recently following a Supreme Court order, brandished a copy of what looked like a book of statutes.

"Here, on this page, it is clearly written that respecting the national anthem is the duty of every citizen and disrespect could invite a prison sentence. This explains the gravity of the offence committed by the CM," alleged Singh.

Local advocate Suraj Kumar also filed a petition was before a Bihar court. *—PTI*

'World will end in 10 yrs due to phones'

In a heated exchange in the state Assembly, Nitish Kumar said the use of mobile phones would lead to the destruction of the world in 10 years.

"We knew there would be trouble, so we stopped in 2019. If this (using mobile phone) continues, the world will end in the next 10 years. It is already banned in the House. I request you (Speaker) that whoever comes with a phone should be thrown out." *Agencies*

Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind slams Nitish, Naidu over Waqf bill

NEW DELHI, 21 MARCH

Maulana Arshad Madani ***PHOTO: PTI***

- President Maulana Arshad Madani said those calling themselves secular and part of the current NDA government were silent on the "oppression and injustice" being meted out to Muslims.

Prominent Muslim organisation Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind on Friday said it would boycott all programmes of NDA constituents -- Nitish Kumar's JD(U), Chandrababu Naidu's TDP and the Chirag Paswan-led LJP -- alleging that they were engaging in politics against Muslims. The President Maulana Arshad Madani said those calling themselves secular and part of the current National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government were silent on the "oppression and injustice" being meted out to Muslims.

They will not only avoid such people as a symbolic protest but also not participate in programmes such as 'Iftar', Eid Milan and other events organised by them, he said.

Madani emphasised that the current situation in the country, and the cruel and unjust treatment being faced by minorities, especially Muslims, was no longer hidden from anyone. Madani said leaders in their pursuit of power were not only siding with communal forces against Muslims but also supporting the destruction of the country's Constitution and laws. He also appealed to other religious organisations, institutions and individuals to refrain from participating in their programmes, even if it was just an 'iftar' party. *—PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

HC posts plea in RG Kar case to Monday

KOLKATA, 21 MARCH

The Calcutta High Court will on Monday hear a petition by the parents of the doctor who was raped and murdered at the RG Kar Medical College and Hospital seeking further probe into the crime. The lawyer representing the parents mentioned the matter before Justice Tirthankar Ghosh, stating that the Supreme Court had asked them to move the designated single bench of the HC with their plea. Justice Ghosh on Thursday said that the matter will appear in Monday's list for hearing in his court as "to be mentioned". The parents in their petition have prayed for further probe by the CBI, which was entrusted with the investigation into the case, by the HC. *—PTI*

Delhi gang held for hacking accounts of DRDO scientist

NEW DELHI, 21 MARCH

Delhi Police have arrested four individuals linked to a gang involved in the hacking of bank accounts, duping a Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) scientist of Rs 40 lakh. The suspects posed as customer service representatives, enticing victims to download malware disguised as an Android Package Kit (APK) under the pretext of resolving issues. This malware provided the fraudsters remote access to the victim's device, enabling them to steal sensitive financial information. The operation traced back to Deoghar in Jharkhand and Mewat in Rajasthan. Among those arrested were Iqbal Ansari, Sajid Khan, Salman Khan, and Narendra Kumar. Police recovered five smartphones containing incriminating evidence. *—PTI*

Police responsible custodial death in Parbhani: Probe

MUMBAI, 21 MARCH

A magisterial inquiry into the custodial death of Somnath Suryawanshi in Parbhani district last December said that police are responsible for his death, the Maharashtra State Human Rights Commission (MSHRC) has announced. Suryawanshi, aged 35, died in a state-run hospital on 15 December while in judicial custody following his arrest linked to violence over the desecration of a replica of the Constitution. Initially, police claimed he fell ill. On 20 March, the MSHRC received a comprehensive report from the magisterial inquiry. The judicial magistrate implicated several Parbhani police officials in their findings. The Commission issued notices to the chief secretary, additional chief secretary, the home department, and various police officials. *—PTI*

High Court denies bail to alleged JeM operative

NAGPUR, 21 MARCH

The Nagpur bench of the Bombay High Court has denied bail to Raees Ahmed Sheikh, a resident of Jammu and Kashmir, accused of being an operative for the banned terrorist organisation Jaish-e-Mohammed. Sheikh was arrested in 2022 for allegedly conducting reconnaissance at the Dr Hedgewar Smruti Mandir, the memorial for the founder of the RSS, on 15 September 2021. The government pleader, Devendra Chauhan, argued that Sheikh's actions fell under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, contending that preparatory actions towards a terrorist act are sufficient for prosecution. Evidence from police and intelligence sources, including call data indicating communication with Pakistan, supported the case. Sheikh remains incarcerated at Nagpur Central Jail. *—PTI*

'Can't hush up 'cash' at judge's house': Lawers, netas

BJP says parties should not comment on court affairs

NEW DELHI, 21 MARCH

The large sums of money allegedly found at Justive Yashwant Varma's residence by authorities after a fire incident sparked massive outrage by both politicians as well as lawmakers.

Senior advocate and Rajya Sabha MP Kapil Sibal on Friday said the issue of corruption within the judiciary is a very serious .

"It has been going on for years. It is time for the Supreme Court to start looking at issues of how the appointment process takes place. That it should be more transparent and appointments should be more carefully carefully done," the Independent Rajya Sabha MP said.

Delhi High Court Chief Justice DK Upadhyaya meanwhile said he was 'shocked' by the findings.

Yashwant Varma *PHOTO: PTI*

Congress's media and publicity department head Pawan Khera said that it cannot be hushed up by transferring him. Khera added the urgency of tracing the cash flow.

In a surprising change in party stance, the BJP spokesperson Sambit Patra said that they should not comment on court affairs. *—PTI*

CREDIT : SIDDHARTH SALDANHA

WHO IS JUSTICE VARMA?

- Appointed as an additional Judge of the Allahabad HC on 13 October, 2014
- Took oath as a permanent Judge of that court on 1 February, 2016
- Appointed as Delhi HC Judge on 11 October, 2021
- One of the three most experienced judges in Delhi

ONGOING/HEARD CASES

- Recently extended bail for Unnao rape case key accused BJP MLA Kuldeep Singh Sengar.
- He said media must be "in tune" with ED and CBI findings in the Delhi liquor policy case.
- Dismissed several petitions by the Congress party in an IT case against the party.
- Refused to reject AAP leader Durgesh Kumar Pathak's plea against a case challenging his 2022 election victory.
- Acquitted AAP leader Satyendar Jain from the Benami case.
- Currently heads a division bench dealing with cases of sales tax, GST, company appeals.

Social media tracking would have stopped Nagpur riots: CM

NAGPUR, 21 MARCH

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis said that social media posts should have been tracked more effectively on the day of the Nagpur riots as it would have helped the police figure out what was being planned.

"Some social media posts had content in Bengali, which is also spoken in Bangladesh. It needs to be ascertained whether this is part of a larger design," the CM said

A local court in Nagpur has ordered the police custody of 17 individuals arrested in connection with recent violence in the city, remanding them until 22 March due to the "seriousness of the offence" and a well-founded prima facie case against them.

The accused were presented before magistrate Maimuna Sultana after their arrests related to an FIR filed by Ganeshpeth police. The police had initially sought seven days of custody, but the court granted only two days.

People walk past barricades at a road at Hanspuri area, amid curfew after recent violence, in Nagpur, Maharashtra *PHOTO: PTI*

The violence erupted on Monday evening, resulting in widespread stone pelting and arson following rumours about a 'chadar' with religious inscriptions being burnt during a protest by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, which demanded the removal of Aurangzeb's tomb in Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar district.

The detainees face serious charges, including promoting religious enmity, rioting, and attempted murder. *—PTI*

Sambhal's Shahi Jama Masjid whitewash done

SAMBHAL, 21 MARCH

The whitewashing of the Shahi Jama Masjid in Sambhal has been completed, marking the end of a renovation process mandated by the High Court that commenced earlier this week.

Masood Farooqui, secretary of the mosque committee,said both the whitewashing and lighting installations are nearing completion. "The painting and whitewashing work is finished, and we expect the lighting to be done today," he stated, expressing confidence in meeting the one-week deadline set by the Allahabad High Court. The restoration, overseen by the Archaeological Survey of India, follows a directive from High Court after the mosque management sought permissions for improvements. This unfolds against a backdrop of legal contention regarding the mosque's history, with claims that it was constructed over an Hindu temple. *—PTI*

SUSPECTED RAPE

Nine-year-old found dead at Manipur relief camp

IMPHAL/ CHURACHANDPUR, 21 MARCH

A nine-year-old girl was found dead in a relief camp in Churachandpur district, Manipur in the early hours of Friday.

The girl had been reported missing from the camp on Thursday evening, prompting her family to search for her. Her lifeless body was discovered later that night within the camp. Officials noted that she bore multiple injuries, particularly around her throat, and had blood stains on her body.

There are suspicions that she may have been raped, although this has yet to be confirmed.

Lawyers call for withdrawal of directive barring Meitei judge

The All Manipur Bar Association (AMBA) urged its Churachandpur district counterpart to withdraw its directive preventing a Meitei judge of the Supreme Court from visiting the district.

The request by the AMBA comes days after the Churachandpur-based lawyers' body stated that "Lordships belonging to the Meitei community, in the interests of peace and public order, shall not step into our district".

A six-member Supreme Court delegation, of which Justice N Kotiswar Singh belongs to the Meitei community, is scheduled to visit the state on Saturday. The AMBA emphasised that the visit it is not politically motivated.

Reacting to the AMBA appeal, the Churachandpur District Bar Association said its notice barring the Meitei judge from entering the district was not driven by ill feelings.

"There is no ill intention against the Meitei community, especially the judges. The situation compelled us to issue the statement. This is purely for the safety of the judge.," Grace Chiinhoihniang, the president of the Churachandpur-based lawyers' body, told PTI.

AMBA president Puyam Tomcha Meitei said the visit is historic and first-of-its-kind.

"It should be warmly welcomed. The directive is unethical," he asserted. *—PTI*

SEEKING REGULARISATION

PHE department workers and daily wagers protest against the Jammu and Kashmir government, in Jammu, on Friday *PHOTO: PTI*

Experts condemn Allahabad High Court ruling on rape

NEW DELHI, 21 MARCH

Legal experts on Friday deplored the observation of the Allahabad High Court on what constitutes a rape charge, calling for a restraint by judges and underlining the drop in public confidence in the judiciary due to such statements.

The High Court ruled that actions like grabbing of breasts and breaking of string of a "pyjama" or lowers of a woman did not amount to rape.

Senior advocate and former additional solicitor general of India Pinky Anand pointed out in the present day and age, particularly in the aftermath of cases such as Satish v. State of Maharashtra where the Supreme Court deprecated the dilution of sexual crimes, the Allahabad high court ruling diluted a heinous crime of attempt to rape which was a travesty of justice.

"The case based on the facts such as grabbing breasts, pulling the strings on her pyjama, and trying to drag her beneath the culvert and the fact that they only ran away due to intervention, falls squarely in the category of attempt to rape, where all possible actions have been taken to rape an 11-year-old girl," she told PTI.

Anand declared a time had come for a "reawakening".

Senior advocate and Supreme Court Bar Association president Kapil Sibal took to X, saying, "God save this country with such judges adorning the Bench!"

"The Supreme Court has been too soft in dealing with errant judges (sic)," he added.

Sibal subsequently said judges, especially those from the high courts, should refrain from making such statements, as it would "send wrong message to the society and people will lose faith in the judiciary".

Senior advocate Vikas Pahwa said the interpretation of the Allahabad High Court appeared to set a concerning precedent by narrowly defining what constitutes an attempt to rape. *—PTI*

Forces struck when Naxals were in a meeting

RAIPUR, 21 MARCH

Naxalites had gathered in remote jungles of Bijapur for a Tactical Counter Offensive Campaign (TCOC) meeting when security forces surrounded them, leading to a fierce exchange that left 26 Maoists dead, Chhattisgarh Deputy CM Vijay Sharma said on Friday.

"Naxalites had gathered in remote jungles for a meeting considering their Tactical Counter Offensive Campaign (TCOC), which is typically observed between March and June, as an appropriate time when security forces surrounded them on Thursday," Sharma, who heads the Home Ministry, told reporters on the premises of the assembly complex.

Cornered from all sides, Naxals opened fire on security forces who retaliated, he said, while hailing the operation as a major achievement against Naxals.

Security forces killed at least 30 members of the banned CPI (Maoist) in two separate encounters in the Bastar region on Thursday.

While 26 Naxalites were killed in Bijapur district, four Maoists were gunned down in Kanker by a joint team of the BSF and District Reserve Guard (DRG) personnel of the state police. A police jawan was also killed in the encounter in Bijapur, officials had said. The bodies of 26 Naxalites besides firearms and explosives were recovered from the spot. *—PTI*

Security forces on an operation against Naxalites, conducted on 20 March in Chhattisgarh's Kanker *PHOTO: PTI*

- Security forces struck when the Naxals had gathered for a meeting. Cornered from all sides, the Naxals opened fire on the security forces, who then retaliated, killing 26 Naxalites

'Naxal-free' villages get Rs 1 crore

RAIPUR, 21 MARCH

The Chhattisgarh government unveiled incentives for village panchayats declaring themselves 'Naxal-free', including mobile connectivity, electricity, and Rs 1 crore for development. Deputy Chief Minister Vijay Sharma announced the "Elvad Panchayat Abhiyan". The new Naxal Surrender and Rehabilitation Policy-2025 supports surrenders with provisions including accommodation, food, and financial assistance. *—PTI*

'TANTRIC BRAINWASHING'

Occult practices central to Meerut murder?

MEERUT, 21 MARCH

Family members of Saurabh Rajput, allegedly killed by his wife Muskan Rastogi and her lover Sahil Shukla, have claimed that occult practices were central to the chilling murder.

Rajput's mother Renu Devi said, "Both Muskaan and Sahil were into occult practices. They killed my son by performing tantric rituals."

"Sahil's occult practices dominated Muskaan's mind in such a way that she started keeping her six-year-old daughter away. Sahil had made Muskaan an addict and completely superstitious," she said.

Neighbours claimed Sahil frequently dressed in yellow and black kurtas with "Mahakal" inscriptions on them while sporting numerous tattoos of religious and mystical symbols. His room was filled with unsettling imagery, including sketches of ominous figures.

Sahil Shukla, one of the two accused, allegedly had posters in his room with unsettling imagery *PHOTO: PTI*

"He used to go out only to feed cats and the lights in his room remained switched off most of the time," a neighbour said.

Rajput's in-laws, Kavita and Pramod Rastogi, alleged Sahil held their daughter Muskan "captive" by making her believe in tantric rituals. He also kept Muskan isolated from her six-year-old daughter, they claimed. Muskan's statements to police indicate that Sahil manipulated her into committing the murder.

"Sahil got Muskan to kill her husband. First, he made her sit on Saurabh's chest. Then he brought a knife from the kitchen, showed her how to wield it and directed her to insert the knife in Saurabh's heart thrice," a source in the police said.

"When Muskan could not bring herself to use the knife, Sahil held her hand and helped her stab Saurabh," the source said.

Saurabh Rajput was allegedly drugged and then stabbed to death by his wife and her lover on 4 March. His body was dismembered and sealed inside a drum with cement. *—PTI*

Delhi HC grants bail to Unitech's Ramesh Chandra

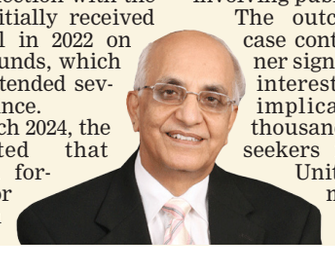
NEW DELHI, 21 MARCH

The Delhi High Court has granted bail to Ramesh Chandra, the 88-year-old founder of real estate firm Unitech, in a money laundering case. Justice Jasmeet Singh announced the decision on Friday, with a detailed order expected soon.

Chandra was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in October 2021 in connection with the case. He initially received interim bail in 2022 on medical grounds, which has been extended several times since.

On 15 March 2024, the court noted that Chandra, a former director of Unitech Limited, is accused of committing serious offences involving the diversion of approximately Rs 5,826 crore, funds that were meant for home buyers who have been left defrauded and without shelter. The allegations stem from multiple FIRs registered by the Economic Offences Wing of the Delhi Police, encompassing various charges such as cheating, criminal conspiracy, and bribery involving public officials.

The outcome of the case continues to garner significant public interest given its implications for thousands of Home seekers impacted by Unitech's alleged malpractices. *—PTI*



PERSIAN NEW YEAR

Iraqi Kurds holding lit torches walk up a mountain during a procession to celebrate their Nowruz (Noruz), the Persian New Year, symbolising renewal and rebirth in the town of Akra, Iraq. Rooted in Zoroastrian traditions, it is observed in Iran, Central Asia, the Middle East, and beyond. Families prepare by cleaning homes, setting up a Haft-Seen table with symbolic items, and celebrating with fire-jumping, festive meals, and gatherings ***PHOTO: PTI***

Global backlash grows against Trump's nationalism

US President Donald Trump suggested redeveloping Gaza after evicting the Palestinians ***PHOTO: PTI***

US President Donald Trump has exploited American nationalism as effectively as anyone in living memory. What sets him apart is his use of national humiliation as a political emotion. Any presidential candidate can talk their country up, but Trump knows how to talk his country down.

Trump's consistent message has been that American problems – trade deficits, job losses, illegal immigration, crime and even drug addiction – are the result of deliberate acts by other countries. The really humiliating part is that American politicians let it happen.

Many Americans have welcomed Trump's message that their country's problems can be solved by reestablishing international dominance. They see this nationalist approach as an overdue corrective to the "globalist" foreign policies of the post-second world war era.

But people in other countries also have feelings of national pride and aspire to be free from foreign domination. This should be obvious, but so far Trump is ignoring the power of nationalism in other countries even as he harnesses it in his own. This makes his foreign policy job a lot harder.

As he prepared for a trade war with Canada, Trump could have concentrated his fire on his enemies in the doomed Liberal government. Instead, he spent months insulting Canada's national identity. He repeatedly said Canada should be the "51st state of the US", calling Trudeau "governor". Trump says 'Canada was meant to be our 51st state' in a Fox News interview.Americans can dismiss Trump's talk of annexing Canada as a joke, but Canadians can't. Regardless of whether Trump would ever follow through with attempting an annexation, his language is an attack on Canadian sovereignty. No one with any sense of national pride would tolerate it.

An Angus Reid poll found the number of people saying they had a "deep emotional attachment" to Canada rose from 49 per cent to 59 per cent from December 2024 to February 2025. That emotional attachment is visible in everything from "buy Canadian" campaigns to Canadians booing the US national anthem at hockey games. The Liberals, under new leader Mark Carney, are also experiencing a remarkable bounce-back in the polls.

Another Angus Reid poll shows that voting intention for the Liberals has surged from 16 per cent in December to 42 per cent now. They are now leading the Conservatives, who have 37 per cent support. Some are now anticipating a snap election could be called in days.

Ontario Premier Doug Ford, who has sometimes been likened to Trump, has also led a ferocious pro-Canadian resistance to American tariffs, getting his own re-election boost.

Trade wars require sacrifices. Citizens must pay more for the sake of protecting their countries' industries. Canadians seem a lot more willing to make that sacrifice than Americans, who are mostly confused that their friendly neighbour has suddenly been recast as an enemy.

The importance of national identity Other countries have shown they will not cave easily, either, as Trump puts their national identity at stake.

Demanding to buy another country's territory, as Trump keeps doing with Greenland, a self-governing territory under Danish control, may be even more insulting than threatening to take it, as he keeps doing with Panama. Each time Greenlanders, Danes and Panamanians refuse Trump, his credibility erodes further.

Trump talks about the territory of other countries in terms of "real estate", even suggesting the United States should "redevelop" Gaza after evicting the Palestinians.

But sovereign land is not real estate. In a world of nation-states defined by territory, even sparsely inhabited territory has "sacred value". This is particularly true for peoples seeking statehood on their land.

Trump clearly doesn't understand this concept. He has shown no empathy for Ukraine, a country whose territory actually has been invaded. He accused Ukrainian President Volodomyr Zelenskyy of wanting to prolong the war so he could "keep the gravy train going", as if harvesting US aid dollars was the real reason Ukrainians were fighting for their country's existence.

Trump's contempt for Ukraine, Canada, Greenland, Gaza, Denmark and Panama has reverberations far beyond these places. It signals that his brand of American nationalism has no place for anyone else's national aspirations or sovereignty. *—PTI*

SALAR سالار

Freed Israeli hostage to UN: 'Where was the world?'

Former hostage Eli Sharabi shares testimony at the UN Security Council ***PHOTO: ISRAELMISSIONTOTHEUN***

Freed Israeli hostage Eli Sharabi, who was beaten, chained and starved while held for 491 days by Hamas, expressed his anger during an appearance at the UN Security Council on Thursday for having to suffer for so long and worry every day about being killed.

"Where was the United Nations? Where was the Red Cross? Where was the world?" Sharabi asked.

He challenged the UN's most powerful body: "If you stand for humanity prove it" by bringing home the 59 hostages still in Gaza, many of whom are believed to be dead.

The fate of the remaining hostages became more uncertain after Israel on Tuesday ended a six-week break in the fighting that had allowed for the return of some hostages in exchange for Palestinian prisoners.

Sharabi said the council talked about the need to get humanitarian aid to Palestinians in Gaza, but he saw Hamas militants eating stolen food from dozens of boxes marked with UN emblems while the hostages starved. They were given maybe a piece of pita and a sip of tea a day, and an occasional dry date, he said.

When he was released on 8 February, Sharabi said he weighed 44 kilograms — less than the weight of his youngest daughter, who was killed along with his wife and older daughter in Hamas' surprise attack in southern Israel on 7 October , 2023, along with about 1,200 others. He was among 251 people taken hostage.

The United States in November vetoed a UN Security Council resolution demanding an immediate cease-fire in Gaza because it was not linked to an immediate release of the hostages.

The Palestinians and their supporters then went to the 193-member General Assembly, which adopted a resolution in December demanding a ceasefire and reiterating its demand for the release of the hostages. Unlike Security Council resolutions, though, those passed by the General Assembly are nonbinding.

The ceasefire that went into effect in January was shattered on Tuesday with surprise airstrikes on Gaza that killed more than 400 Palestinians, one of the highest death tolls in the nearly 18-month war. Gaza's Health Ministry said most victims were women and children.

Sharabi's appearance before the council, the second by a freed hostage, followed an Israeli request last week for a meeting on the plight of the hostages.

Britain's deputy ambassador James Kariuki called Sharabi's suffering "beyond the imagination" and said "Hamas must be held accountable for their despicable actions."

But Kariuki also said the UK condemns Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz's "warning of the total destruction of Gaza." Britain calls for the rapid resurgence of aid to Gaza, an investigation into allegations of sexual and gender-based violence against Palestinian detainees by Israeli forces, and an urgent return to the ceasefire deal, he said. France's new U.N. ambassador, Jérôme Bonnafont, expressed his country's deepest condolences to Sharabi but also condemned the resumption of Israel's bombing, saying it will not ensure the release of hostages, and demanded an end to Israel's humanitarian blockade of Gaza.

Russia's deputy UN ambassador Dmitry Polyansky told the council, "Our hearts were filled with sorrow as we listened to the tragic story of Eli Sharabi," adding "such brutality can have no justification." Polyansky criticised Israel's leaders for not moving to phase 2 of the ceasefire deal, which calls for the release of all hostages and a permanent end to the fighting. He said it's difficult to discuss the future when Israel's military and political leaders appear to have made the choice in favor of war.

Algeria's U.N. Ambassador Amar Bendjama, representing the Arab world on the council, called Sharabi a "representative of civil society," and said "no civilian, irrespective of their background, should endure suffering."

He then accused Israel of "cherry-picking" international law. He pointed to Israel's ban on humanitarian aid, fuel and electricity entering Gaza since March 2, its killing of civilians, and the cutoff of the International Committee of the Red Cross' access to over 9,500 Palestinians detained in Israeli prisons since 7 October. After all council members spoke, Riyad Mansour, the Palestinian UN ambassador, sent "our condolences" to Sharabi over the killing of his loved ones and his prolonged captivity. He said Palestinians "understand this pain because we live it." Sharabi made no mention of Israeli actions, except to say that on the morning of 7 October, when he heard that militants were inside Kibbutz Be'eri where he lived, he reassured his wife not to worry: "The army will come, they always come." That morning, they never came.

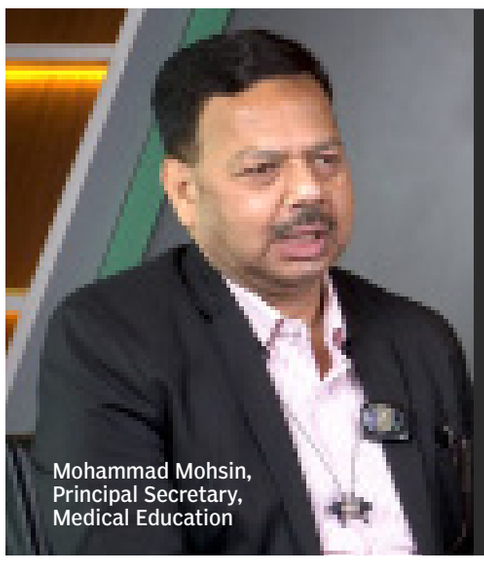
He told the council he came to speak for 24-year-old Alon Ohel, a fellow hostage whom he left behind in the tunnel, and all others, including his older brother, Yossi, who was killed but whose body remains in Gaza.

"Bring them all home. Now!" Sharabi said. *—PTI*

LETTERS

write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

NAHEED ATAULLA



'Want to join civil services, take sanyaas for two years'

Mohammad Mohsin, principal secretary in the department of medical education, Karnataka government, is not just a bureaucrat but also a news maker for initiatives taken in his various postings. A forthright and rule book officer of 1996 batch Karnataka cadre, Mohsin had to face the ire of the Election Commission, when he was posted as general observer in Sambalpur in Odisha during the 2019 Lok Sabha polls. He got into trouble for ordering the inspection of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's helicopter which led to his suspension. The Election Commission rules exempt Special Protection Group protectees from checkings. Mohsin challenged his suspension, which was revoked by the Central Administrative Tribunal. In an interview to **Salar News**, Mohsin dives into his journey of bureaucracy, politics, controversies and his personal life.

1. How will the state government implement its decision to cancel the will or property deeds of children who abandon their parents by admitting them in hospitals as this will involve coordination of various departments?

The issue of children leaving their parents in hospitals as they will get shelter and food came to our notice when we reviewed the functioning of the Belagavi Medical Institute of Research. There were 27 people though the Institute's director had taken steps to contact the children and send the parents to them. But it was recurring and we had to take some steps to avoid it. Though the nurses there are taking care of them, a 24/7 care is not possible. Moreso, those beds will be occupied by the parents. We have spoken to some NGOS and the women and child welfare department to accommodate them but they are finding it difficult. Hence, we decided to take action to make it a rule of cancelling the will or property deeds and file cases.The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007, empowers us to take action suo motu.

2. While the issue of raising the retirement age of government employees is a debatable one, the government is considering increasing the superannuation of specialists from 60 years to 65 years. Will the move not lead to delay and denial of opportunities for the young doctors?

We are talking of raising the retirement age of doctors who are in specialised services. In government hospitals, we have a shortage of doctors in the fields of cardiology, urology, oncology and nephrology. We cannot match the salary structure of the private hospitals. Therefore specialists who are working with us will feel secure if the retirement age is raised. If a senior staff member retires at the age of 60 years, we won't have faculty. It is not that the retirement age of every general doctor will be raised.

3. What safety measures has the medical education department drawn up after the rape and murder incident of a woman doctor trainee in RG Kar Medical College and Hospital in Kolkota?

After the Kolkata incident, we have made provisions of separate restrooms for women. If the female doctors or interns are staying overnight, rooms should be given. Vehicles to drop them home and CCTV cameras with control rooms are functioning round the clock.We have kept Pink Boxes for anybody to drop complaints. Shortly, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah will be releasing the Violet book for medical colleges to follow the standard operating procedure (SOP), on what or how to handle if anything happens.

4. In your 29 years of service as an IAS officer in charge of revenue, labour, backward classes and now medical education, which has been the most challenging post?

Each post is different and each has its own challenges. As Gadag's deputy commissioner there were heavy rains and floods. Some labourers were marooned. I had to call for helicopters to rescue and also drop food to the marooned people as Gadag had never seen such flash floods. In medical education a lot of fire fighting is there, while in the labour department we have to interact with the industries and the labour force. Their opinions differ and we have to work as an umpire.

5. Sometimes bureaucrats posted in districts endear themselves to the people there with their work. You became popular when posted as Vijayapura's deputy commissioner. What work did you take up there?

I worked in Vijapura in two capacities as the CEO of the zilla panchayat and deputy commissioner. I have not done anything special, but one practice I introduced was that anybody could come and meet me. I used to regularly travel across the district and interact with the people. The public had the comfort that there was someone to hear them. As deputy commissioner,I embarked on the encroachment and city beautification drive. Also Vijayapura is a city which has a lot of monuments after Jaipur. Beautifying the city will bring tourists andVijapura is one place where there are still tongas.

6.While most bureaucrats remain extremely cautious to not come across as anti-government on social media, your tweets and retweets have been rather anti-establishment. In May 2020, the Karnataka government issued a show-cause notice to you for questioning the media for not highlighting the services of the Tablighi Jamaat members for donating plasma for treatment of Covid patients when you said: ``they will not show the humanity work done by these persons.''

I personally feel negative news sells in the media. Why doesn't the media highlight the positive side as we have to bring positive vibes in the society.That was the reason I questioned the media. I will not say my questioning was anti establishment. I explained to the state government and it accepted my explanation.

7.Six years down the line, do you stand by your decision that subjecting Prime Minister Narendra Modi's helicopter for an inspection in Sambalpur in Odisha during the 2019 Lok Sabha polls was the right step for which you had to face the ire of the Election Commission in the form of suspension?

We have to follow the rules and whatever I did, it was as per rules. Till today nobody has questioned me and in recent elections we have seen a lot of VVIPS helicopters were checked. Everybody has justified saying rules were followed. Whatever I did was as per rules and I stand by it. I have never violated rules and I never will because I have taken an oath on the Constitution. I will follow the rules wherever I am posted whether it's a short or long term posting. I have no regrets for doing it.

8. What got you interested in joining the civil services?

It's an interesting story. My father was a businessman but I did not want to join his business and was interested in civil services. I have done M. Com from Patna university. I was preparing for the civil services in Patna, but I was not doing justice and came to New Delhi, where I joined the Hamdard Study circle in 1994. It was a dream run for me and I was there in the Circle for six months when I applied for the IAS prelims.I did not qualify and the Circle has rules that you go out of the coaching institute. I decided not to go back home, stayed in New Delhi. After two months, another list of those who had qualified in the prelims was announced and my name was there. I went back to the Circle and prepared for the Mains. Luck and stars were aligned, I qualified. In the second year, I qualified in all exams, passed the IAS and was allotted the Karnataka cadre. Within two years from scratch, I was able to qualify as I am an average student scoring 63 per cent or 65 per cent. My advice to all those aspiring to join the civil services is for two years, you have to take a sanyaas and there is nothing that can stop you except yourself!

—Salar News

Complete interview available on www.salarnews.in or Salar Youtube channel @dailysalardigital

Tunisia's president sacks third PM in less than two years

TUNIS, 21 MARCH

Tunisian President Kais Saied has fired Prime Minister Kamel Maddouri less than a year after his appointment, as the country grapples with economic and political crises, worsened by an increasing arrival of migrants and refugees from sub-Saharan Africa. Saied made the announcement late on Thursday, replacing Maddouri with Sara Zaafarani, an engineer who has been minister of equipment and housing since 2021. Tunisia's president has full powers to dismiss ministers and judges. With Thursday's appointment, Zaafarani becomes Tunisia's third PM in less than two years, and the country's second female PM. *—Agencies*

N Korea tests new missiles amid US–S Korea drills

SEOUL, 21 MARCH

North Korea on Friday said it test-launched new anti-aircraft missiles, as its military vowed grave steps against the US and South Korea over their joint military drills that it views as an invasion rehearsal. State-run media said leader Kim Jong Un oversaw the tests on Thursday and said the missiles featured "another major defense weapons system" for North Korea. The missile launches, North Korea's sixth weapons testing activity this year, occurred on the same day that the US and South Korean militaries concluded their annual Freedom Shield command post exercise. The 11-day training was the allies' first major joint military exercises since the inauguration of President Donald Trump in January, and the two countries held diverse field training exercises alongside the Freedom Shield drills. *—PTI*

2 convicted in US for Iran-funded journo murder plot

NEW YORK, 21 MARCH

A jury has convicted two men of plotting to assassinate Iranian American journalist Masih Alinejad at her home in New York City in a murder-for-hire scheme that prosecutors said was financed by the Iranian government. The verdict was returned at a federal court in New York on Thursday, ending a two-week trial that featured dramatic testimony from a hired gunman and Alinejad, an author, activist and contributor to Voice of America. Prosecutors said the convicted men, Rafat Amirov and Polad Omarov, were crime bosses in the Russian mob. Their lawyers argued that they were innocent and trial evidence was flawed. Iran offered USD 5,00,000 for a July 2022 killing of Alinejad after efforts to harass, smear and intimidate her failed, prosecutors said. *—PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

3 Indians face death for smuggling drugs into Indonesia

SINGAPORE, 21 MARCH

Three Indian nationals accused of drug trafficking aboard a Singapore-flagged cargo vessel, who have been detained in Indonesia since July 2024, face the death penalty, a media report said on Friday. Raju Muthukumaran, Selvadurai Dinakaran and Govindhasamy Vimalkandhan, who have been working in the shipping industry in Singapore, were arrested for allegedly smuggling 106 kg of crystal meth aboard the Legend Aquarius. All of them hail from Tamil Nadu. Acting on a tip-off, Indonesian authorities intercepted the vessel in the Pongkar waters of Karimun district, about an hour from Singapore by ferry. The trio faced a major setback on 14 March when the vessel captain, who was ordered to testify in person, failed to appear in court, reported Singapore's Friday weekly Tabla! *—PTI*

BLAZE-TRIGGERED BLACKOUT SHUTS HEATHROW AIRPORT

At least 1,350 flights affected; hundreds of thousands stranded

LONDON, 21 MARCH

A photo provided by London Fire Brigade on Friday shows a fire at the North Hyde electrical substation that started on Thursday night and lead to widespread power outage **PHOTO:PTI**

Britain's Heathrow Airport was closed all day on Friday after a fire at a nearby electrical substation knocked out its power, disrupting flights for hundreds of thousands of passengers at Europe's busiest travel hub.

At least 1,350 flights to and from Heathrow were affected, flight tracking service FlightRadar 24 said, and the impact was likely to last several days as passengers try to reschedule their travel.

Some 120 flights were in the air when the closure was announced, with some turned around and others diverted to Gatwick Airport outside London, Charles de Gaulle Airport in Paris or Ireland's Shannon Airport, tracking services showed.

Lawrence Hayes was three-quarters of the way to London from John F. Kennedy International in New York when Virgin Atlantic announced they were being diverted to Glasgow.

"It was a red-eye flight and I'd already had a full day, so I don't even know how long I've been up for," Hayes told the BBC as he was getting off the plane in Scotland. "Luckily I managed to get hold of my wife and she's kindly booked me a train ticket to get back to Euston, but it's going to be an incredibly long day."

The fire at a power station about 2 miles from the airport was brought under control about seven hours after it erupted in a ball of flames, the London Fire Brigade said.

"We don't know the cause of this fire. It's obviously an unprecedented event," Energy Secretary Ed Miliband said. He said the fire had also knocked out a backup generator supply to the airport.

Heathrow said in a statement that the fire had given it no choice but to close the airport for the day.

"We expect significant disruption over the coming days, and passengers should not travel to the airport under any circumstances until the airport reopens," the airport said. *—PTI*

Russia continues airstrikes on Ukraine despite ceasefire deal

KYIV, 21 MARCH

In this photo provided by the Ukrainian Emergency Service, firefighters put out the flames at a storehouse in Odesa on Friday. **PHOTO:PTI**

Russian drones pummelled the Ukrainian Black Sea port city of Odesa, injuring three people and sparking massive fires, officials said on Friday. The attack underlines Moscow's intention to pursue aerial attacks even as it agreed to temporarily halt strikes on energy facilities.

The strike came shortly before Czech Republic President Peter Pavel visited Odesa early Friday morning and held meetings with the city's leaders and officials from other southern regions.

"This is another reminder to the whole world: the war continues and Ukraine continues to fight," the head of the Odesa region, Oleh Kiper, said. He reported blazes at least three locations after the attack late Thursday. Over 70 people and 20 fire engines were involved in dousing the "massive fires".

The Ukrainian air force reported that Russia fired 214 exploding drones and decoys in the latest wave of attacks. It said 114 of them were intercepted and another 81 were jammed.

Russian official to meet Kim

Sergey Shoigu, Russia's Security Council secretary, had arrived in Pyongyang, the North Korean capital, and plans to meet top North Korean officials including Kim, abrief dispatch by Russia's state-run news agency Tass reported, but gave no further details including what Shoigu would discuss with Kim.

North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency confirmed the arrival of a Russian delegation led by Shoigu but it also did not provide any detail on the purpose of their visit. *—PTI*

INDIAN-ORIGIN RADIO DJ BOOKED IN SINGAPORE

SINGAPORE, 21 MARCH

A Singaporean Indian-origin Radio DJ and Tamil-language actor was on Friday charged with sex-related offences, including having sexual communication with a minor.

Gunalan Morgan, 43, was handed seven charges at the State Courts, four of which are related to sex offences, reported Channel News Asia. A gag order was issued on the identities of the three alleged victims and the locations where the alleged offences occurred. Gunalan, a Singaporean, is a producer-presenter with Mediacorp's Tamil radio station Oli968 and a popular Tamil-language actor, according to media reports.

Mediacorp said Gunalan was immediately suspended from work after the company became aware of his arrest, and that a termination notice has been served on him. It declined to comment further, according to the Channel report. *—PTI*

SUDANESE MILITARY RETAKES CAPITAL AFTER 2 YRS OF WAR

CAIRO, 21 MARCH

Sudan's military said it retook the Republican Palace in Khartoum, the last bastion in the capital of rival paramilitary forces, after nearly two years of fighting.

Social media videos showed its soldiers inside giving the date as the 21st day of Ramadan, which was Friday. A Sudanese military officer wearing a captain's epaulettes made the announcement in the video, and confirmed the troops were inside the compound.

The palace appeared to be partly in ruins, with soldiers' steps crunching broken tiles underneath their boots.

The fall of the Republican Palace, a compound along the Nile River that was the seat of government before the war erupted and is immortalized on Sudanese banknotes and postage stamps, marks another battlefield gain for Sudan's military.

It has made steady advances in recent months under army chief Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan.

It means the rival Rapid Support Forces, under Gen. Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo, have been expelled from the capital of Khartoum after Sudan's war began in April 2023.

The group did not immediately acknowledge the loss, which likely will not stop the fighting as the RSF and its allies still hold territory elsewhere in Sudan. *—PTI*

Israel fires intel head amid protests

JERUSALEM, 21 MARCH

Tens of thousands of people have demonstrated against the government since Tuesday, following the intention to fire Ronen Bar as the head of the internal intelligence service Shin Bet **PHOTO: X**

Amid widespread protests, Israeli government sacked Ronen Bar, the head of the country's internal security agency. "The Government unanimously approved Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's proposal to end ISA Director Ronen Bar's term of office (as the head of the Shin Bet, Israel's internal intelligence service)," said a statement from the prime minister's office.

Tens of thousands of people have demonstrated against the government since Tuesday, following the intention to fire Bar. The Shin Bet, along with Israeli police, is currently investigating several of Netanyahu's aides over alleged financial connections to Qatar while also working for the Israeli leader. Bar did not attend the meeting, choosing to send a letter instead.

In the letter, leaked to the media, Bar called the process of firing him "inappropriate for any employee, let alone a high-ranking one, let alone the head of the Shin Bet". *—DW News*

INDIAN IN PRO-HAMAS DRIVE

US bid to deport student stalled

NEW YORK, 21 MARCH

A US federal judge has blocked the deportation of an Indian student at Georgetown University who was arrested after federal authorities accused him of "actively spreading Hamas propaganda".

Badar Khan Suri is a postdoctoral fellow at the Alwaleed Bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding at the Edmund A Walsh School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University, Washington DC. In a 20 March court order, District Judge Patricia Tolliver Giles said, "It is ordered that petitioner shall not be removed from the United States unless and until the court issues a contrary order."

A senior Department of Homeland Security spokesperson earlier said that "Suri was a foreign exchange student at Georgetown University, actively spreading Hamas propaganda and promoting antisemitism on social media. Suri has close connections to a known or suspected terrorist, who is a senior advisor to Hamas.

"The Secretary of State issueda determination on March 15, 2025 that Suri's activities and presence in the United States rendered him deportable."

Suri's lawyer Hassan Ahmad had filed a petition on 18 March, stating that the Department of Homeland Security had arrested and charged Suri with "removability" on 17 March. *—PTI*

Beijing rejects plea for info on students

China has protested a a US congressional panel's request this week to six US universities to provide details of Chinese students in advanced science and technology programmes. The letters were sent on Thursday by John Moolenaar, the chair of the US House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party, who alleged that Beijing was using students to tap sensitive technology. *—Agencies*

TRUMP ORDERS US EDUCATION DEPT SHUT: WHAT'S AT STAKE

Student Loans & Financial Aid

- The department manages $1.5T in student loans
- Uncertain future for loan forgiveness

Civil Rights Protections

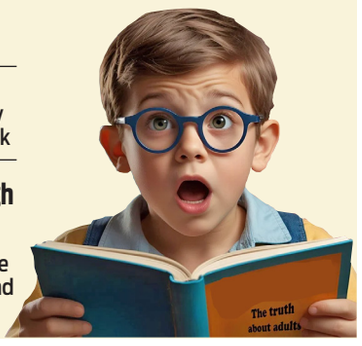
- The Office for Civil Rights oversees anti-discrimination laws in schools
- Protections for LGBTQ+ students and racial equity policies may be rolled back

K-12 (kindergarten through 12th grade) funding

- Federal programs like Title I (low-income schools) and IDEA (special education) face cuts.
- States may struggle to replace lost funding

College Accreditation

- Trump wants to replace accreditors enforcing "woke" policies
- Uncertain future for federal research grants and college oversight



TRUMP'S EXIT THREAT

Europe eyes 'NATO sans US' in 10 yrs

LONDON, 21 MARCH

NATO will ask Europe and Canada to boost its weapons and equipment stockpiles by 30 per cent, amid its political infighting with the US and Trump's repeated threats to withdraw from the bloc **PHOTO: X**

Europe's biggest military powers are drawing up plans to take on greater responsibilities for the continent's defence from the United States, including a pitch to the administration of President Donald Trump, for a managed transfer over the next five to 10 years, according to a new report.

The United Kingdom, France, Germany and the Nordic countries are among those engaged in the informal but structured discussions that would reshape the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) security bloc, The Financial Times newspaper reported on Thursday, citing four European officials involved.

The news also comes as Bloomberg News reported on Friday that NATO will ask Europe and Canada to boost its weapons and equipment stockpiles by 30 per cent, amid its political infighting with the US and Trump's repeated threats to withdraw from the bloc.

According to the FT report, the talks are an attempt to avoid possible chaos should the US unilaterally declare its withdrawal from the security alliance.

The Europeans reportedly want to present the plan to the US ahead of NATO's annual leaders' summit in The Hague in June. At present, the US contributes 15.8 per cent to the NATO yearly expenditure of USD 3.5B. It also deploys between 80,000 and 100,000 soldiers across Europe.

European countries like Germany, France and the UK have already announced they will increase their defence spending.

Quoting government officials, the FT report said it would take an estimated five to 10 years of increased spending to raise European capabilities to a level "where they could replace most US competences". *—Agencies*

Pakistani Army captain, 10 terrorists killed

PESHAWAR, 21 MARCH

A Pakistani Army captain and at least 10 terrorists associated with a banned outfit were killed during a gunfight in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Dera Ismail Khan district, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) has said.

Hasnain Akhtar **PHOTO: X**

The operation was conducted on Thursday following reports of the presence of terrorists in the area, the military's media wing said. "Hasnain was known for his courage and bold and daring actions during previous operations," it said.

The ISPR said the killed terrorists were involved in numerous attacks against law enforcement agencies as well as target killing of innocent civilians. It further said, "A sanitisation operation is being conducted in the area and the security forces are determined to wipe out the menace of terrorism from the country. Such sacrifices of brave young officers further strengthen our resolve."

The country was facing increased terrorist attacks especially targeting law enforcers and security forces since the Taliban returned to power in Afghanistan in 2021, particularly in the bordering provinces of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan.

The country witnessed a 42 per cent surge in terror attacks in January 2025 compared to the previous month, a report said. *—PTI*

Rupee jumps 36P to close at 86 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 21 MARCH

Rising for the sixth straight session, the rupee appreciated 36 paise to close at 86 (provisional) against the US dollar on Friday on a sharp rise in the domestic equity markets and fresh foreign capital inflows. At the inter-bank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 86.26, then touched an intraday high of 85.93 and a low of 86.30 against the greenback. The unit ended the session at 86 (provisional) against the dollar, registering a gain of 36 paise from its previous closing level. This is the sixth straight session of gain for the rupee, during which it has added 123 paise. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.19 per cent higher at 104.04.—*PTI*

PHOTO: X

Gold suffers ₹400 slide to land at ₹91,250/10gm

NEW DELHI, 21 MARCH

Gold prices decreased Rs 400 to Rs 91,250 per 10 grams in the national capital on Friday due to profit-booking and a subdued trend in the global markets, according to the All India Sarafa Association. Gold of 99.9 per cent purity had settled at Rs 91,650 per 10 grams on Thursday. Gold of 99.5 per cent purity went lower by Rs 400 to Rs 90,800 per 10 grams. It had concluded at Rs 91,200 per 10 grams. Extending the losses for the second straight session, silver prices also declined by Rs 1,700 to Rs 1,00,300 per kg from Thursday's closing level of Rs 1.02 lakh per kg."Gold prices fell due to profit-taking by the traders and a recovery in the US dollar," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst of Commodities at HDFC Securities, said.—*PTI*

Jindal Stainless CFO Anurag Mantri resigns as ED&CFO

NEW DELHI, 21 MARCH

Jindal Stainless Ltd (JSL) on Friday said Anurag Mantri has resigned from the post of Executive Director (ED) and Group Chief Financial Officer (CFO). He will cease to be the Executive Director and Group CFO with effect from the close of business hours of 4 April, 2025, JSL said in a regulatory filing. Mantri has tendered his resignation from the services to pursue new professional opportunities, it said. JSL is India's largest stainless steel producing company —*PTI*

PHOTO: X

iQOO in search for an under-25 chief gaming officer

NEW DELHI, 21 MARCH

To capitalise on the expanding gaming market, smartphone maker iQOO has launched a search for a Chief Gaming Officer (CGO) under the age of 25 to co-create its devices and increase engagement with online gamers, according to a top company official. The CGO will work closely with the gaming community, exchanging insights, including gameplay, gaming style, presentation, and game interpretations. The CGO will collaborate with the brand to co-create smartphones, lead the brand's eSports vision, and actively engage with India's top eSports gamers, he said, adding that the vivo group brand is offering Rs 10 lakh for six months to the CGO. The iQOO brand recently teamed up with seven leading gaming icons to test its devices and get real-time feedback —*PTI*

Adani Energy clinches ₹2,800cr project in Guj

To supply green power to plants in Mundra

NEW DELHI, 21 MARCH

PHOTO: X

Adani Energy Solutions Ltd (AESL) on Friday said it bagged a Rs 2,800 crore power transmission project in Gujarat. The project will supply green energy for manufacturing of Green Hydrogen and Green Ammonia at Mundra in Gujarat, AESL said in an exchange filing.

This project "Transmission System for Green Hydrogen/ Ammonia Manufacturing Potential in Mundra, Gujarat" involves upgrading the Navinal (Mundra) electrical substation by adding two large 765/400kV (kilovolt) transformers.

The project will see the addition of 150 circuit kilometre (cKM) of transmission lines and 3,000 MVA (megavolt-amperes) of transformation capacity to AESL's overall transmission infrastructure, taking them to 25,928 cKM and 87,186 MVA, respectively.

Additionally, a 75 km long 765kV double-circuit line will be constructed to connect this substation to the Bhuj substation. This is its sixth order win this fiscal year for the company, taking its order book to Rs 57,561 crore, the company said.

> This is its sixth order win this fiscal year for the company, taking its order book to Rs 57,561 crore, the company said

AESL won the project under the Tariff-Based Competitive Bidding (TBCB) mechanism and PFC Consulting Ltd was the bid process coordinator.

The project SPV was formally transferred to AESL on 20 March.

AESL, part of the Adani portfolio, is a multidimensional organization with presence in various facets of the energy domain, namely power transmission, distribution, smart metering, and cooling solutions.

It is the country's largest private transmission company with a cumulative transmission network of 25,928 ckm and 87,186 MVA transformation capacity. —*PTI*

SENSEX, NIFTY GAIN

Markets bounce back after falling in opening trade

MUMBAI, 21 MARCH

PHOTO: PTI

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty opened on a negative note on Friday but soon recovered the lost ground and were trading with gains as fresh foreign fund inflows supported investors' sentiments.

The 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex declined 252.8 points to 76,095.26 in early trade. The NSE Nifty dropped 57.85 points to 23,132.80.

However, later both the benchmark indices recovered all the lost ground. The BSE benchmark gauge traded 205.09 points higher at 76,550.97, and the Nifty quoted 70.05 points up at 23,262.55.

From the Sensex pack, Bajaj Finance, Nestle, Kotak Mahindra Bank, NTPC, Maruti, Power Grid, Adani Ports, Tata Motors, Reliance Industries and Bajaj Finserv were among the gainers.

However, Infosys, Titan, HCL Tech, Tata Consultancy Services, HDFC Bank, IndusInd Bank, Tech Mahindra, Asian Paints and Zomato were among the laggards.

US markets ended marginally lower on Thursday.

Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 3,239.14 crore on Thursday, according to exchange data.

"The rally in the market this week which saw the Nifty rise by 3.5 per cent has come at a time when trade tensions are escalating and more is expected when the reciprocal tariffs kick in on April 2. The main driver of the rally is the buying by FIIs in the cash market in two days," VK Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist at Geojit Financial Services, said.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.43 per cent to USD 72.31 a barrel. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

US POLICIES TO HAVE MINIMAL IMPACT ON INDIA

NEW DELHI, 21 MARCH

India's economy is expected to weather the storm of US trade tensions, thanks to its favorable trade balance with the US. However, the ultimate impact will depend on the outcome of trade negotiations between the two nations, according to a report by Union Bank of India.

The Indian Rupee has depreciated by approximately 2 per cent this year, despite a weak US dollar index.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has been proactive in mitigating the indirect effects on liquidity and financial stability.

Key exports to the US, including automobiles, gems, and jewellery, steel, aluminium, pharmaceuticals and textiles, are crucial to India's economy.

The RBI and government have taken proactive steps to maintain stability and growth, ensuring India's economic momentum despite external challenges. —*PTI*

SIDBI to handle ₹1,000cr finance of space industry

NEW DELHI, 21 MARCH

PHOTO: X

Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) Venture Capital Limited has been selected as the fund manager for Rs 1,000 crore venture capital fund announced by government to support private sector firms in space technology domain.

Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre made the announcement on Friday. The fund will deploy the amount earmarked for it over a period of five years, with a planned deployment of Rs 150 crore in the 2025-26 financial year followed by Rs 250 crore each in the next three financial years and Rs 100 crore in 2029–30.

One of the objectives of the fund is to counter the "trend of Indian companies domiciling abroad", government said. The fund will focus on early-stage investments and

> The fund will deploy the amount earmarked for it over a period of five years, with a planned deployment of Rs 150 crore in the 2025-26 financial year

will bank on firms to be able to raise "further private equity investments".

Even late-stage firms will receive investments ranging from Rs 30 crore to Rs 60 crore and the early stage firms will receive half that range. India aims to increase the estimated value of domestic "space economy" from USD 8.4 billion to USD 44 billion by 2033 —*PTI*

TAX CUTS ADD PACE

India to become consumption capital of the world, says report

NEW DELHI, 21 MARCH

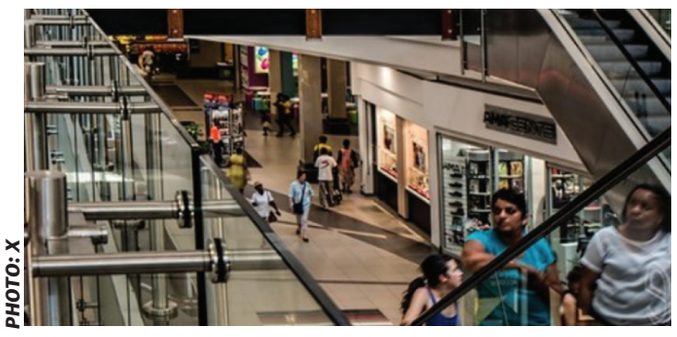


PHOTO: X

India is poised to become the world's consumption capital, surpassing major economies, driven by its rapidly expanding consumer base. According to a report by Angel One, Iconic asset, India's consumption is projected to double by 2034, driven by the fastest-growing consumer base in the world.

Consumption currently accounts for 56 per cent of India's GDP and is the fastest-growing segment of its economy. The report highlights that household growth in India, driven by nuclear family trends, is outpacing population growth, leading to rising consumption.

Furthermore, India's savings are projected to increase 10-fold over the next 25 years, reaching USD 103 trillion by 2047. Recent tax cuts are also expected to unlock Rs 1 lakh crore, driving incremental consumption of Rs 3.3 lakh crore and potentially boosting India's GDP by 1 per cent.

The report identifies consumer electronics, apparel and accessories, and experience economy as the fastest-growing categories in discretionary consumption. With 92% of retail trade still flowing through traditional Kirana stores, there is a massive opportunity for modern retail to scale and capture market share.

India's Gen Z population, which outnumbers the entire US population, will play a significant role in driving consumption growth. By 2035, every second rupee spent will come from this demographic, adding to India's consumption growth story. —*ANI*

PHOTO: X

BAIN CAPITAL OFFERS ₹5,764CR FOR 26% MANAPPURAM STAKE

NEW DELHI, 21 MARCH

US-based private investment firm Bain Capital has launched Rs 5,764 crore open offer to acquire an additional 26 per cent stake in gold loan financier Manappuram Finance.

The open offer was triggered following Bain Capital's decision on Thursday to acquire an 18 per cent stake in Manappuram Finance for a consideration of Rs 4,385 crore.

The open offer price has been fixed at Rs 236 per share. Based on the open offer subscription, Bain Capital's stake post the investment will vary between 18 per cent to 41.7 per cent on a fully diluted basis.

Existing promoters will hold a 28.9 per cent stake in the company post the investment on a fully diluted basis, including shares to be issued pursuant to the exercise of warrants.

The transaction is subject to customary closing conditions and regulatory approvals.

Founded in 1949, Manappuram Finance is a leading non-banking financial institution

The Kerala-based company has expanded beyond gold loans into microfinance, vehicle finance, housing finance and SME lending, establishing itself as a diversified financial services provider with significant scale and strong growth momentum.

Bain Capital has deep experience in investing to support the growth and leadership of a diversified set of financial services businesses in India and globally. —*PTI*

BHEL secures ₹7,500cr order for Ukai power plant in Gujarat

NEW DELHI, 21 MARCH

PHOTO: PTI

State-owned Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd (BHEL) on Friday said it has secured an order worth Rs 7,500 crore for setting up a unit of 800 MW at the Ukai Supercritical Thermal Power Plant in Gujarat.

The order has been placed on BHEL by the Gujarat State Electricity Corporation Ltd, a statement said. The unit will start commercial operation within 54 months. According to the statement, BHEL has secured an order under international competitive bidding, for setting up a 1x800 MW Ukai supercritical thermal power plant (Unit-7) on an Engineering, Procurement & Construction (EPC) basis, in Tapi district, Gujarat. Notably, the proposed unit will be set up on the existing ash dyke area.

BHEL's scope of work in the project envisages design, engineering, manufacturing, supply, testing, and commissioning for the EPC package, along with all necessary electrical, civil, and structural works.

The scope also includes the supply of highly efficient emission control equipment. As India's foremost power equipment manufacturer, BHEL continues to play a pivotal role in bolstering India's energy security and supporting the vision of self-reliance in the power sector. —*PTI*

$305M boost lifts Forex reserve to $654.271B

NEW DELHI, 21 MARCH

The country's forex reserves increased by USD 305 million to USD 654.271 billion during the week ended March 14, the RBI said on Friday.

In the previous reporting week, the overall reserves rose by USD 15.267 billion to USD 653.966 billion and registered the sharpest weekly rise in two years. The spike in foreign reserves was partly attributed to the USD 10 billion forex swap done by the Reserve Bank of India.

The reserves have been on a declining trend recently due to revaluation, along with forex market interventions by the RBI to help reduce volatilities in the rupee. The forex reserves increased to an all-time high of USD 704.885 billion in September 2024.

For the week ended March 14, foreign currency assets, a major component of the reserves, decreased by USD 96 million to USD 557.186 billion, the data released on Friday showed.

> The reserves have been on a declining trend recently due to revaluation, along with forex market interventions by the RBI to help reduce volatilities in the rupee

Expressed in dollar terms, the foreign currency assets include the effect of appreciation or depreciation of non-US units like the euro, pound and yen held in the foreign exchange reserves.

Gold reserves increased by USD 66 million to USD 74.391 billion during the week, the RBI said. The Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) were up by USD 51 million to USD 18.262 billion, the apex bank added.

India's reserve position with the IMF was also up by USD 283 million at USD 4.431 billion in the reporting week, the apex bank data showed. —*PTI*

NEW MILESTONE

India surpasses 1B tonnes in coal production

NEW DELHI, 21 MARCH

PHOTO: X

India achieved a historic milestone by surpassing 1 billion tonnes in coal production, marking a significant step towards meeting the country's growing energy demands, Union Minister for Coal and Mines, G Kishan Reddy said on Friday.

Leveraging advanced technologies and efficient mining practices, India has not only boosted production but also prioritized sustainable and responsible mining The Union Coal and Mines Minister added in a post on X.

"India has crossed a monumental 1 billion tonnes of coal production! With cutting-edge technologies and efficient methods, we've not only increased production but also ensured sustainable and responsible mining.

This achievement will fuel our increasing power demands, drive economic growth, and ensure a brighter future for every Indian," he wrote.

According to official data released by the Ministry of Coal last month, with the fifth-largest geological coal reserves globally and as the second-largest consumer, coal continues to be an indispensable energy source, contributing to 55 per cent of the national energy mix.

Approximately 74 per cent of power generation in India relies on Thermal Power Plants (TPPs), reaffirming the need for a robust and sustainable coal sector, said the Minister.

Among the eight core industries, coal has exhibited the highest growth rate, recording a 5.3 per cent increase in December 2024 compared to the previous year. Additionally, the coal sector accounts for about 50 per cent of freight revenue for Indian Railways and provides direct employment to nearly 4.78 lakh individuals. —*ANI*

Ola Electric share price up post sales figure correction

NEW DELHI, 21 MARCH

PHOTO: X

Ola Electric share price on Friday surged 6 per cent as the company addressed sale discrepancies, saying that backlog in February, caused due to vendor negotiations, had caused misleading figures. The company said 40 per cent of the backlogs cleared and the remaining will be fully addressed by the month-end.

The company had previously said it sold 25,000 electric scooters in February but the data on government's Vahan portal showed only 8,651 scooters registrations. As of March 20, the company's registrations stood at 11,781 on the Vahan portal.

"Our sales remain strong, and the temporary backlog in February was due to ongoing negotiations with our vendors responsible for vehicle registrations. "This backlog is being rapidly cleared, with daily registrations exceeding 50 per cent of our three-month daily sales average. About 40 per cent of the February backlog has already been cleared, and the remaining will be fully resolved by the end of March 2025," the company said.-. —*PTI*

PHOTO: X

Shubhankar tied 15th with 68 in Singapore

SINGAPORE, 21 MARCH

Shubhankar Sharma shot 4-under 68 with three birdies that saw him finishing on tied 15th after the first day of the weather-affected Porsche Singapore Classic on the DP World Tour here. At the Laguna Golf and Country Club, his lone blemish was a double bogey in the middle of the round on the ninth hole. Sharma, who had a rough start to the season, birdied the first, fourth, eighth, 10th, 12th, and 13th and the double bogey came on the ninth. Veer Ahlawat had a difficult day with 1-over 73 that had two birdies against three bogeys. He was T-83 and will need a low round to cut. Matthew Jordan produced a back-nine birdie blitz to sign for an opening 65 and share the lead with fellow Englishman Marcus Armitage. *—PTI*

NZ and NC to meet in Oceania qualifying final

WELLINGTON, 21 MARCH

Nottingham Forest striker Chris Wood scored a hat trick of headed goals as New Zealand beat Fiji 7-0 Friday to join New Caledonia in the Oceania qualifying final for the 2026 World Cup.New Caledonia earlier beat Tahiti 3-0 in the first semifinal in FIFA's smallest confederation.The winner of the Oceania qualifying series will gain direct entry to the World Cup for the first time. That means the victor in Monday's final in Auckland, New Zealand will join hosts Canada, the United States and Mexico and Japan, which on Thursday became the first nation to qualify for the 48-team tournament.New Zealand captain Wood headed Sarpreet Singh's cross home to open New Zealand's scoring in the sixth minute as it led 4-0 halftime. *—PTI*

AIU bans two more Indian athletes

NEW DELHI, 21 MARCH

Indian long-distance runners Pradhan Kirulkar and Vivek More have been banned for three and five years respectively by the Athletics Integrity Unit (AIU) after they tested positive for prohibited substances.Both athletes' positive results were from in-competition tests conducted during the Pune Half Marathon on December 15, 2024, adding to a recent surge in doping cases involving Indian athletes.On Tuesday, Archana Jadhav also tested positive for a banned substance from a urine sample collected during the same event. She has been banned for four years.Kirulkar's urine sample collected during Pune Half Marathon in December last year, which he had won with a time of 1:04:22, was found to contain Meldonium when tested at the National Dope Testing Laboratory in New Delhi. *—PTI*

Raúl Jiménez's brace sends Mexico past Canada 2-0

INGLEWOOD, 21 MARCH

Raúl Jiménez scored in the opening minute and again in the 75th, lifting Mexico into the CONCACAF Nations League final with a 2-0 victory over Canada on Thursday night. Jiménez, a 33-year-old Fulham striker, scored his 36th and 37th international goals to thrill a stadium packed with fans of El Tri, welcomed as the home team whenever it plays in Southern California. Mexico will face Panama on Sunday night at SoFi Stadium—*PTI*

IPL kicks off today with fresh leaders, saliva ban reversal

Rain threat looms over KKR vs RCB IPL opener match

IPL captains with the trophy PHOTO: PTI

KOLKATA, 21 MARCH

New rules and new captains will be in focus but the razzmatazz will be pretty much the same when the 18th Indian Premier League kicks off here on Saturday with defending champions Kolkata Knight Riders taking on perennial underachievers Royal Challengers Bengaluru amid a looming threat of rain.

There is plenty to look forward to in the league. Among the most prominent rule changes is the lifting of the saliva ban. For the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic, bowlers will be allowed to use it to shine the ball.

RCB vs KKR Match starts at 7.30 pm IST

The BCCI lifted the ban after receiving a majority consensus from IPL captains in a landmark decision taken at the captains' meeting in Mumbai. The International Cricket Council had made the saliva ban permanent in 2022, but the IPL operates under its regulations and the latest move could set a precedent for the global game.

The 18th season will also witness tactical innovations, including a major change to counter Dew's impact.

A steady drizzle in the evening brought a premature end to evening practice sessions of Kolkata Knight Riders and Royal Challengers Bengaluru on the eve of their IPL 2025 opener at Eden Gardens here on Saturday.Practice began as scheduled at 5pm, but rain set in around 6pm, bringing the ground staff into action while the players had to pack up. Fortunately, Eden Gardens is one of the few venues with full ground covers, ensuring the playing surface remained protected.. *—PTI*

IPL is a different beast: Varun

He may have been one of the main architects of India's Champions Trophy triumph, but mystery spinner Varun Chakravarthy believes the IPL presents an entirely new challenge, calling it a "different beast" with the need to press the restart button. Chakravarthy was instrumental in India's success, picking up five wickets in his first match against New Zealand and finishing with nine wickets in three games. However, he remains cautious about carrying over past success."Confidence is very subjective. Every new tournament, even if you win the last tournament, you have to start from scratch," Chakravarthy said at the pre-match media interaction ahead of their match against Royal Challengers Bengaluru here on Saturday."You have to start from zero. As they say, if you score a hundred in the previous match, you have to start from zero.

IPL TO CATALYSE JAISWAL'S T20 WC INCLUSION: COACH

NEW DELHI, 21 MARCH

Jwala Singh, the formative coach of Yashasvi Jaiswal, believes the IPL season will be key to the opener's bid to reclaim a spot in India's squad for next year's T20 World Cup.

The 23-year-old Jaiswal has impressed in Tests but faces stiff competition in the T20I setup, with openers Sanju Samson and Abhishek Sharma in solid form for the national team.

The T20 showpiece will be co-hosted by defending champions India and Sri Lanka from February to March 2026.

"He has played a lot of T20s for India, with many fifties at a good strike rate, but in the last 2-3 series, he was rested, I can say that.

"But yes, I believe this year's IPL will give him that opportunity (for the T20 World Cup) because there will be a lot of matches and high-pressure games," Singh told PTI Videos on Friday. Jaiswal has so far scored 723 runs in 23 T20Is. *—PTI*

VIRAT KOHLI IS GOING TO HAVE A BIG IMPACT AGAIN: KANE WILLIAMSON

BENGALURU, 21 MARCH

Virat Kohli might have tweaked his batting approach a bit over the years, but former New Zealand captain Kane Williamson has little doubt that the champion batter will have a "big impact" on the fortunes of Royal Challengers Bengaluru in IPL 2025.

Kohli has shown glimpses of his old form during the recent Champions Trophy, and will once again lead the RCB batting line-up from the opening slot.

The 36-year-old will walk out for RCB against the Kolkata Knight Riders at the Eden Gardens on Saturday.

"No doubt he's going to have a big impact again as he has done in almost every season of this tournament. I know he's extremely motivated with RCB to push for a title and I'm sure this season they'll be there or thereabouts," Williamson told media during an interaction on Friday. Williamson, who went unsold in last year's IPL auction, observed that Kohli's changed approach to the game will not affect his batting or effectiveness.

"It's quite interesting as players kind of go into different stages of their career, different phases. He's been on the scene for several years but his style perhaps adjusts a little bit.

"But the hunger remains and the passion remains and we've seen that in his performances recently as well," he added.

Williamson was tad sceptical about shining the ball using saliva to bring any noticeable changes in white ball cricket, but he hoped that it would give some breathing space to the bowlers.

"Over my time in white ball cricket, it's always been quite tough to shine the white ball. Whether it (saliva ban removal) has a large impact or not, I guess we'll find out. I suppose any sort of help in shining might add some benefit. "If it does swing then it does bring the seam bowlers, the swing bowlers into the game a lot more. *—PTI*

Hamilton wins sprint pole position in China

SHANGHAI, 21 MARCH

Lewis Hamilton astonished the crowd and himself by securing his maiden Sprint pole position for Ferrari in the final moments of qualifying Friday at the Chinese Formula 1 Grand Prix.

Hamilton arrived in Shanghai after his disappointing season-opening race last weekend in Australia, where he finished 10th in his first race for Ferrari. He only managed fourth fastest in opening practice here for a modest improvement on that. He topped the first section of sprint qualifying for the season before the dominant McLaren of Lando Norris took over in SQ2. An aborted lap from the McLaren driver, following a mistake on his final lap, handed Hamilton his chance – and the seven-time world champion took it in stunning style with less than a minute remaining.

Hamilton's time was just 18 one-thousandths of a second ahead of Red Bull's Max Verstappen, with Norris' McLaren teammate Oscar Piastri third. Ferrari's Charles Leclerc was fourth, with Mercedes' George Russell closing out the top five.

"I didn't expect that result, but so, so happy and so proud," Hamilton said. "I think the last race was a disaster.—*PTI*

PAKISTAN TOUR OF NZ

Nawaz slams maiden ton as Pakistan chase 205 in 16 overs

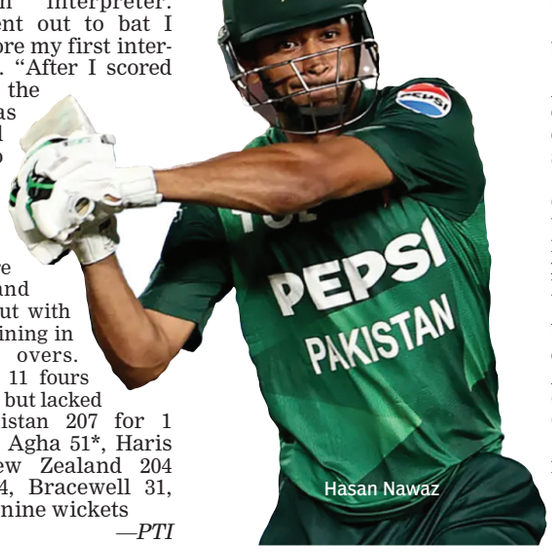
AUCKLAND, 21 MARCH

Hasan Nawaz made an unbeaten 105 from 45 balls as Pakistan beat New Zealand by nine wickets in the third Twenty20 international Friday to keep alive the five-match series.

Pakistan won the toss and was able to bowl first, reversing the trend of the first two matches which New Zealand won by nine and five wickets. Nawaz was supported in his first century by captain Salman Ali Agha, who made 51 from 31 balls in an unbroken partnership of 133 for the second wicket. Pakistan finished at 207-1, running down the home team's total of 204 with four full overs to spare to inflict New Zealand's heaviest T20 loss in terms of wickets.

Nawaz made ducks in both of the first two matches.

"I failed in the first two games and I thank the team for backing me," he said through an interpreter. "When I went out to bat I wanted to score my first international run. "After I scored the first run the pressure was released and I wanted to win the game." Mark Chapman made 94 from 44 balls before New Zealand was bowled out with one ball remaining in their 20 overs. Chapman hit 11 fours and four sixes but lacked support. Pakistan 207 for 1 (Nawaz 105*, Agha 51*, Haris 41) beat New Zealand 204 (Chapman 94, Bracewell 31, Rauf 3-29) by nine wickets *—PTI*



Hasan Nawaz

NATIONS LEAGUE

Croatia beats France 2-0 in QFs to spoil Mbappé's return

LONDON, 21 MARCH

Croatia contained the attacking duo of Kylian Mbappé and Ousmane Dembélé in a 2-0 victory over France in the first leg of the Nations League quarterfinals.

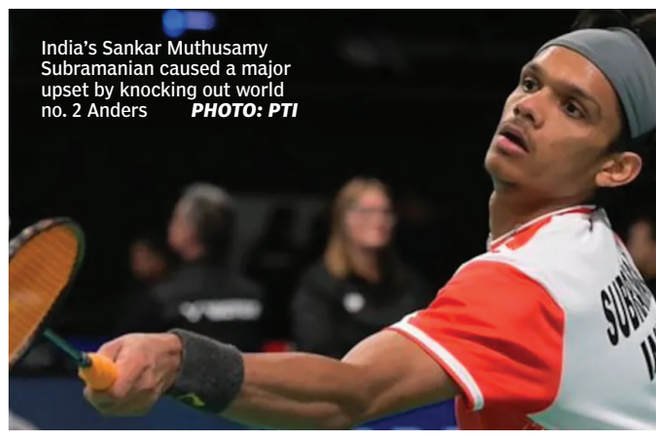
Ante Budimir on Thursday (March 21, 2025) headed Croatia ahead in the 26th minute off a cross from Ivan Perišic with France goalkeeper Mike Maignan partially blocking the ball before it crossed the line.

Perišic doubled the advantage in first-half stoppage time in Split to spoil Mbappé's return after a six-month absence from the national team.

Andrej Kramaric's penalty in the eighth minute was saved by Maignan, who dived to the right but used his feet to make the stop. Mbappé tested Dominik Livakovic with several shots in the first half but the Croatia goalkeeper produced some decent saves to deny him. *—PTI*

Kylian Mbappe during the UEFA Nations League quarterfinal soccer match between Croatia and France PHOTO: X / @K.MBAPPE

SWISS OPEN BADMINTON



India's Sankar Muthusamy Subramanian caused a major upset by knocking out world no. 2 Anders PHOTO: PTI

India's Sankar Subramanian stuns World No. 2 Anders

BRISBANE, 21 MARCH

India's Sankar Muthusamy Subramanian caused a major upset by knocking out world no. 2 Anders Antonsen of Denmark in a thrilling three-game contest to reach the men's singles quarterfinals of the Swiss Open Super 300 badminton tournament here. The 21-year-old from Tamil Nadu, a silver medallist at the 2022 World Junior Championships and currently ranked 64th in the world, put up an impressive display of defense to defeat the three-time World Championships medallist 18-21 21-12 21-5 in a 66-minute contest.

This win marks one of the biggest victories of Subramanian's career, which will boost his confidence as he continues his transition into the senior ranks.

Next, the Indian will face world no. 31 Christo Popov of France, a 2019 World Junior Championships silver medallist. Popov had a strong 2024 campaign, claiming titles at the German and Hylo Opens. He was the runner-up at this year's German Open.

Subramanian is the sole Indian singles player remaining in the tournament, while the women's doubles pair of Treesa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand also advanced to the quarterfinals. The world no. 9 pair defeated Germany's Amelie Lehmann and Selin Hubsch 21-12 21-8 on Thursday.

Among other Indians, Isharani Baruah put up a valiant fight but lost 19-21 21-18 18-21 to China's Han Qian Xi in 63 minutes.

Anupama Upadhyaya was ousted by Indonesia's world no. 11 Putri Kusuma Wardani as she lost 17-21 19-21 in another women's singles match.

The mixed doubles pair of Sathish Karunakaran and Aadya Variyath had a tough outing, going down 14-21 16-21 to Liu Kuang Heng and Jheng Yu Chieh.

Subramanian vs Antonsen Subramanian was more precise, while Antonsen struggled with his control at St Jakobshalle, often sending his shots wide and long. *—PTI*

Pranati Nayak PHOTO: PTI

GYMNASTICS: NAYAK QUALIFIES FOR VAULT FINAL IN FIG WC

NEW DELHI, 21 MARCH

Indian gymnast Pranati Nayak has qualified for the Vault final after securing a third place in the qualification round at the FIG Apparatus World Cup in Antalya, Turkey.

The 29-year-old, who represented the country at the Tokyo Olympics, came up with an aggregate score of 13.317 in the vault qualification.

She finished behind the American duo of Jayla Hang (13.783) and Claire Pease (13.584). The Vault final is scheduled for Saturday.

"Pranati did well in the qualification and with better execution, she can be a medal prospect in the finals," her coach Ashok Kumar Mishra told PTI.

Pranati had clinched the bronze medal in the women's vault event of the FIG Apparatus World Cup in Cairo before the Paris Olympics last year.

She also won vault bronze medals at the Asian Championships in 2019 (Ulaanbaatar) and 2022 (Doha). *—PTI*

Vinicius's late goal seals Brazil's 2-1 win over Colombia

SAO PAULO, 21 MARCH

A last-minute goal by Vinicius Júnior secured Brazil's 2-1 win over Colombia in World Cup qualifying on Thursday, helping his team and millions of fans avoid more disappointment. A draw would have seen Brazil slump to sixth in the South American standings. Instead, Brazil moved to second spot behind Argentina after Vinicius Júnior's long-range goal.

The top six teams in South America are guaranteed spots at next year's World Cup in Canada, the U.S., and Mexico, and so the victory released some pressure on Brazil coach Dorival Júnior ahead of next week's game against Argentina. The five-time champions have never missed a World Cup. Lionel Scaloni's Argentina squad has 25 points after 12 games — four points clear of Brazil (21 points from 13 games) — and is close to securing its place in the 2026 World Cup. *—PTI*